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PART I DATA SHEET.

i) a/-	Name of Project and State (attach Index plan indicating catchment area, submergence, state boundry, existing and proposed projects upstream and downstream and broad features of the project like head works, Canals, project command etc.	Rajal canal pr[oject] lift scheme J&[K] State (Index p[lan] attached vide Plate No.2).
b/-	Is the project included in the place and what is allocation for it ?	Yes amount not allocated yet.
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EVOLUTION OF THE HINDU PANTHEON



The Vedic Age *
The Pauranic Period *
Modern Times *

By

Dr. Sampurnanand

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-7

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OF
THE HINDU PANTHEON

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book comprises the text of three lectures on the subject "Evolution of the Hindu Pantheon" delivered by Dr. Sampurnanand, Governor of Rajasthan, on December 26, 27 and 28, 1962, in the Bhavan's Annual Birla Endowment Lectures on Indian History.

These lectures fully reflect Dr. Sampurnanand's deep understanding and profound scholarship of the Vedas and Shastras. Not only are they illuminating and thought-provoking on important aspects of Indian culture, mythology and history, but also present an extremely able, authoritative and balanced evaluation of the contributions made to India's culture, mythology and history by successive religious leaders.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE HINDU PANTHEON

I. The Vedic Age

शं नो मित्रः शं वरुणः । शं नो भवत्वर्यमा ।
शं न इन्द्रो बृहस्पतिः । शं नो विष्णुरुरुक्रमः ॥

IT WOULD APPEAR to many friends that in taking up this subject, I am wasting my time and, of course, the time of my audience by discussing a theme which has already been discussed threadbare. It is true, of course, that a large number of distinguished men, great Indologists, anthropologists, linguists and students of Comparative Religion have considered this and allied problems and have arrived at certain conclusions which are more or less accepted by scholars all the world over. An exception must be made in the case of the Indian pundit of the old school but he is, as a rule, not vocal and his bare assertion, not backed by that wealth of argument which is available to modern scholarship, carries no weight. Even educated India sets little store by it.

The history of Religion is the story of man's rise to civilization from a primitive stage lower

than that of the savage even. The earliest members of the new species Homo Sapiens must have walked the earth naked, singly or in small groups, always on the look-out for dangers lurking behind every bush, with no weapons other than their keen intellects with which to face the powerful enemies who roamed the forests around them. They could not have been self-conscious then and their whole environment was one immense continuum of which man and beast, tree and insect, Sun and mountain, were the constituents on equal terms. There could be no religion in these conditions, though even primitive man must have had in his sense of curiosity, fear and wonder, the first dim stirrings of the religious urge. The epic adventure which began millions of years ago is not yet over; the long and arduous journey through savagery and barbarism to civilization, the transformation, first, into the nomad and huntsman, then, into the agriculturist and now into the town-dweller are all stages on a long trail whose end is not yet in sight.

It was as an agriculturist with a fixed domicile that man, now fully conscious of himself as a distinct entity, began to take stock of his surroundings. Apart from man and beast with whom his relations were perfectly understan-

dable, he had to contend with other things, entities, beneficent and otherwise, who or which had an influence on his life and work. He had to understand them, if possible, and to rationalise his relations with them. Obviously, it was to his interest to keep on friendly terms with them. He had also time to think of other problems, the problem of the Dead, for instance, and to usher a code of conduct, devoid of arbitrariness, to regulate his behaviour with his fellows, to make the society, in which he found himself, reasonably stable. All this led him straight to Religion. The first thing he naturally did was to endow the great natural phenomena like thunder and lightning with consciousness and will; mysterious forces and functions like sex and fertility received the same treatment. Later, much later in fact, as man's understanding of, and control over, Nature grew deeper and wider, he outgrew these crude beliefs and evolved those systems of belief and worship which have crystallised into the world's great religions.

This is a brief, perhaps much too brief, summary of the conclusions arrived at by the accepted authorities on the subject. I am not interested in denying that the development of religion in the people who came to call themselves Aryans may have followed the broad

outlines laid down above. There is no difficulty in my accepting the opinion that, in matters of religion, the Aryan people were deeply influenced by their contact with the culture of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. I would not even consider it worthwhile, in this context, to try to refute the startling theory that 'the Brahman was not originally a pure Aryan at all, but a priest of the native race and religion, who was taken into the households of the conquering nobles as a sort of private chaplain, in order to teach them the religions of the country, which it is always dangerous for the stranger not to know'. (Dr. John Murphy, *The Origins and History of Religions*, Ch. XXII.)

But here, I am afraid, I must part company with Western scholars. I do not accept the view that the Vedic gods represent the great phenomena of nature—sky, sun, moon, thunder-cloud, dawn, anthropomorphised to some extent; I do not believe that the Rigveda bears witness to vagueness about the soul or that there was a cult of Soma, raising this drink to the status of a high god. It may be that the idea that keeping a small fire bright on the hearth would strengthen the heavens and make the gods mighty seems childish to the modern mind and that such ideas make

one feel that one is in the realm of magic, rather than religion. But if the Vedic Aryan kept a bright fire burning on his hearth, he did not do so with the purpose of strengthening the heavens or making the gods mighty. I am starting from the Vedic period, it must be remembered, the period mainly of the hymns of the Rig Veda and some of the hymns of the Atharva Veda, and it is my firm conviction that, in that age, the religion of the Aryans had already transcended those concepts of which alone western scholars take cognizance. Why it was that, of all ancient peoples, the Indian Aryan alone did so is another story, important and interesting but not strictly within this context.

No other evidence except the internal evidence of the Vedas themselves is needed to substantiate my point. Only we must approach the books without pre-conceived notions. Because the Vedic Aryans were a predominantly pastoral people, they must have conformed to the agricultural type of religion is the main pre-conceived notion that stands in the way of a fair study of the Vedas. There is in the Vedas enough material whose superficial study would justify such a conclusion. There are many words, proper names and others which the hymns have taken over from

the older language of the people and these words have not shed off their old associations. Sometimes, such words have been deliberately used to convey certain symbolic meanings. But, at the same time, no careful and unbiassed reader could help being struck by the suspicion that the hymns cannot be merely collections of the folk-songs of nomadic shepherds and naïve cultivators. There must be something else, something elusive, behind this facade. Maxmuller, as we know, after paying a well-deserved tribute to the beautiful poetry that characterises the hymns connected with Usha, interpreted as the Dawn, asked in despair, "But is the dawn everything?" The question remained un-answered. Needless to say, similar questions could be put about the Sun, the intoxicating Soma, rain clouds, the night, not to refer to the other gods. They must have been a curious people indeed who preserved with such veneration poems numbering several thousand, all descriptive of natural phenomena, and continue to this day to look upon them as the fountainhead of all knowledge and wisdom.

Scholars could not fail to notice the fact that the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda contains many hymns of a philosophic nature. Obviously, such material does not accord with

the general pattern of agriculture-based, much less of earlier, culture. But the embarrassment which this might cause has been boldly resolved by treating it as an interpolation. It is assumed that at the end of the Vedic period, which coincided with the rise of the Brahmanas and the Upanishads, the priests had begun to pay increasing attention to philosophical questions and the results of their speculations are embodied in the hymns which were, later, incorporated in the Rig Veda. It was naturally found convenient to tack them on to the end of the compilation.

Incidentally, this assumption is founded on an error into which many earnest Indians are also liable to fall. It has become a fashion to study the Upanishads by themselves. This method of study often leads to the conclusion that they represent some kind of an intellectual revolt against the ritual and priestcraft of the Vedic hymns. No importance is attached to the fact that Vyasa and his commentator Shankaracharya, the greatest exponents of the Jnana Marga, the Path of Jnana, support the study of the Vedas and the performance of th rites enjoined by them and speak of them a absolutely necessary. Again, it is impossible to understand the Upanishads without understanding the hymns. Many words are used

whose significance derives from their occurrence in the hymns in special contexts, and imagery and symbolism based on the hymns are freely employed. The Upanishads do not represent an intellectual departure from the Samhitas, as the collections of Vedic hymns are called; they are companion volumes, as it were, elaborating the thought briefly and succinctly expressed in the hymns. That is why it is said:

मन्त्रब्राह्मणयोर्वेदनामधेयम्

'The Samhitas and Brahmanas together constitute the Vedas'.

The simplification aimed at in treating the philosophic contents of the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda really achieves nothing. The rest of the book refuses to sink down to the unsophisticated level of pastoral culture. The book is, as a matter of fact, full of philosophical speculations–the word is not mine–and one comes across deep philosophic thought in most unexpected places. And philosophy does not stand alone. There are specific and numerous references to spiritual experience, the experience of the Yogi.

I shall try to show by means of a few quotations that even if the whole of the tenth mandala were to be taken away, there are passages all over the rest of the Rig Veda and in

many parts of the Atharva Veda which cannot be explained or explained away on the natural phenomena theory of religion. They obviously refer to deeper, more esoteric things.

Let us begin with the well-known statement:

एकं सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति

Ekam Sad Vipra bahudha vadanti.

'It (the Reality) is one, Sages call it by many names'. Surely, this is a philosophical statement and it occurs in the 46th verse of the 164th hymn of the first mandala of the Rig Veda. The same meaning is approached from a different direction in the following verse, the 10th of the 79th hymn of the first mandala:

अदितिर्द्यौरदितिरन्तरिक्षमदितिर्माता स पिता स पुत्रः ।
विश्वे देवा अदितिः पञ्चजना अदितिर्जातमदितिर्जनित्वम् ।।

'Aditi is the heavens (or sky), Aditi is that which lies between earth and sky, Aditi is mother, father and son, Aditi is all the gods, Aditi is the five tribes (of Aryans), Aditi is all that was born and will be born'.

Whatever or whoever Aditi may be, surely this is a statement of the basic position of monistic philosophy. Or take this verse:

चत्वारि वाक् परिमिता पदानि तानि विदुर्ब्राह्मणा ये मनीषिणः ।
गुहा त्रीणि निहिता नेङ्गयन्ति तुरीयं वाचो मनुष्या वदन्ति ।।(I-164-45)

'Vak, the word, the Logos, has four feet or stages which are known to Brahmans possessed of pure intelligence. (People) do not know the three concealed in the cave; men speak the language of the fourth level.'

Attempts are made to explain this verse in grammatic terms. The four feet are supposed to be नाम (the subject), आख्यात (the predicate), उपसर्ग (the prefixes etc.) and निपात indeclinable particles). But this interpretation cannot fit the text. There is nothing particularly difficult of comprehension about these parts of speech to require a highly-developed intellect to understand them. There is nothing mysterious about any of these parts and men use language which includes all of them. Obviously what is referred to here is the four forms of words परा, पश्यन्ती, मध्यमा and वैखरी the last being the sounds uttered by men and other living beings. The other three are not matters of ordinary experience. They, particularly the first, can become objects of cognitions only to the man who delves deep within himself through the process of Yoga. It is this Vak which in 1.164.41 is said to be सहस्राक्षरा परमे व्योमन् 'in the highest empyrean, it is thousand-lettered,' meaning infinite, the source of all the infinity of sound, audible and inaudible, which fills the universe.

In VI.47.18 it is stated about Indra

इन्द्रो मायाभिः पुरुरूप ईयते ।
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ॥

'He is one but assumes innumerable forms through his Maya', the power which creates the illusion of the one appearing as the many. It is not necessary to multiply instances. So, I shall confine myself to giving only two or three more, the first one from the Atharva Veda. In Ch. 10, there is a Sukta, which speaks of Ayodhya, the city of the gods. The description runs in these words:

अष्टाचक्रा नवद्वारा । देवानाम्पूरयोध्या या ।
तस्यां हिरण्मयः कोशः स्वर्गो ज्योतिषावृतः ॥
तस्मिन् हिरण्मये कोशे त्रिदिवे त्रिप्रतिष्ठिते ।
तस्मिन् यदन्तरात्मन्वत् तद्वै ब्रह्मविदो विदुः ॥

'The city of the gods, Ayodhya, has eight chakras (nervous plexuses) and nine doors. In it there is a golden body, covered with light. In that golden body, of the three heavens and supported by the three, that which is like the inner Ego is known only to the knowers of Brahma.'

The city of nine doors is obviously the human body but the rest can only be interpreted in terms of Yogic experience. Can this by anything like the description of a city on earth? It may be pure fanciful versification but no so-called natural phenomena are portrayed here.

It is easy to speak of the 10th Mandala as being more or less an interpolation or a later composition, but it is so interlinked with matters referred to in previous mandalas that it is difficult to sustain the thesis. The Purusa Sukta, for instance, occurs in the 10th Mandala. It is an account of the symbolical sacrifice performed by the gods at the beginning of creation. In the first place, this seems to be a very old composition because it is retained not only in the Yajurveda but in the older part of the Atharva Veda also. Again, it is connected with matter contained in other places in the Rig Veda.

In the attempt to reduce the Rig Veda to the naive and spontaneous songs of a pastoral people, innocent of sophisticated thinking, the book will have to be pruned and censored in such a way as to remain hardly recognizable.

'Who and what are the Vedic gods, then?' is the question that has really to be answered if we do not accept the view that they are the anthropomorphised versions of the natural phenomena. Let me make it clear that I do not assert that there are no interpolations in the Vedic text, as we find it today. It would be surprising if there were not. Nor do I maintain that there are no descriptions of natural pheno-

mena among the hymns. Not only is it probable that some poems portraying nature in its many moods have been preserved but there is every likelihood of descriptions of, and references to, historical events also finding place among the collections of hymns. What I plead for is that such passages cannot be a guide to our study of Vedic religion. Nor can definite information be gathered from prayers alone. A prayer can give an idea about the person who is praying, from what he asks for one can gather an idea about the society in which he lives and his own social outlook but it is possible for an identical set of words to be addressed in prayer to two entirely different types of divinity.

The fact of the matter is that having outgrown the outlook one naturally associates with a pastoral people, the Aryan priests as also the elite among the ruling classes were reaching out to new horizons, both spiritually and intellectually. They were putting new questions to themselves, questions about the Reality behind phenomena, about what happens after death, about the gods whom their fathers and their fathers before them had worshipped. Here is an example of such questions:

पृच्छामि त्वा परमन्तं पृथिव्याः पृच्छामि यत्र भुवनस्य नाभिः ।

पृच्छामि त्वा वृष्णो अश्वस्य रेतः पृच्छामि वाचः परमं व्योम ॥
(I,164,34)

'I ask you what is the end of the earth, I ask you where is the centre of the universe, I ask you what is the cause of the Sun (literally, this horse which causes rain), I ask you what is the highest region of Speech (the Logos).' Or take this:

को अद्धा वेद क इह प्रवोचद्देवाँ, अच्छा पथ्या का समेति ।
दद्रश्र एषामवमा सदांसि, परेषु या गुह्येषु व्रतेषु ॥ (III,54,5)

'Who knows and who can tell us definitely which is the path that leads to the gods? One can see the lower regions of the gods but which is the path that leads to their higher, secret planes, which are referred to in Vratas?'. They had also discovered methods which, for a time, freed them from the trammels of the body and the waking consciousness and put them *en rapport* with the Reality, with an infinite expansion of the consciousness. The levels of consciousness revealed in the course of this spiritual pilgrimage of the soul, the replies to its questions which the mind formulated in this condition of exaltation – all this experience was startling. The whole universe came to be suffused with a new light. The message had to be brought down. As the Rig Veda itself says:

इमां वाचं कल्याणीमावदानि जनेभ्यः

'this message ensuring the ultimate good has to be conveyed to all men'. But the Vedic seers were not thoughtless iconoclasts, out to disrupt society which they and their fathers had led for generations. It was, therefore, conveyed in symbolic language mostly. In any case, ordinary language would have been too inadequate for the purpose. Some statements, laying down philosophical propositions, were there as beacon lights to draw attention prominently to the new horizon. But very often, the imagery of the old sacrificial rites and the traditions of the race, the old stories about gods and men and the powers of evil, were utilised for the purpose of conveying the new lessons. In this way, the old theology, whatever it might have been, was slowly re-orientated. The old words came very often to clothe new meanings. The popular mind was brought up to a new spiritual level while the key to the passages dealing with the more esoteric facts of experience, the mysteries, was handed down from master to disciple. Unfortunately, this key has been lost. Vedic exegesis will never be meaningful unless the key is recovered again. Mere verbal jugglery will not do. Only faith and spiritual insight will lead to these secret recesses of the heart where the key reposes. Sayana, the great com-

mentator, did not possess it. And he was only interested in the Vedic texts as necessary adjuncts to ritual.

It is at this stage of their development that we first meet the people who called themselves Aryans. The key to much that is esoteric having been unfortunately lost, the result is that the Samhitas come before us as collections of boring hymns, treatises on lifeless ritual and poems expressing the awe and wonder excited in the more or less primitive mind by natural phenomena. It might be interesting to give one or two examples of the kind of symbolic language of which the Vedas are full. Let us take the 20th verse of the 164th hymn of the 1st Mandala of the Rig Veda:

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्ति अनश्नन्नन्यो अभिचाकशीति ॥

'Two birds, similar to each other, friends to each other, sit on the same tree; of the two, one eats the tasteful fruit thereof, the other, not eating, looks on'.

Obviously this is a symbolic expression of a philosophical theory. This famous verse is one of the main Vedic supports of the Sankhya system of philosophy, which explains the two birds as the Purusa, the ego, which is yet in a state of nescience and the Purusa, the ego which has attained Kaivalya, self-realisation.

Others interpret the verse as referring to God and the Jiva. But in any case, the words cannot refer to mundane phenomena.

Take another example, an example par excellence of the use of symbolic language. I refer to the fifteenth chapter of the Atharva Veda, popularly known as the Vratya Kanda. Every European scholar who has attempted to tackle it has given up in despair. Even Sayana has failed to penetrate its meaning and left it without a commentary. They all agree in calling it abstruse but probably this is only an euphemism for non-sense. After wrestling with it for several years, I have tried to interpret it and derive a consistent meaning from it. My interpretation is based on Yoga. It may or may not be right. This is for others to decide. However, I shall give one or two extracts from it to show how baffling it is.

As the name shows, the whole chapter deals with the Vratya. Now-a-days, the word Vratya stands for a person whose sacred thread ceremony has not been performed within the prescribed time. In the Vratya Kanda, the word has at least two meanings. In certain passages, it is obviously used for God who seems to be identified with Rudra; in other places, it is equally obviously used for a Yogi. In certain passages, neither meaning is clear from the

wording itself. For instance, the seventh sentence says:

नीलमस्योदरं लोहितं पृष्ठम्

'His belly is blue and his back is red'. This cannot refer to a human being but to whom else does it refer? Passages like this are the despair of the commentator but worse is to come. The Vratya is described as moving in one direction after another, separately dressed for each journey and with a different following on every occasion. One example is as good as another, so I shall take his first trip. It is said:

स उदतिष्ठत् स प्राचीं दिशमनुव्यचलत् । तं बृहच्च रथन्तरञ्चा-
त्याश्च विश्वे च देवा अनुव्यचलन् । श्रद्धा पुंश्चली भित्रो मागधो
ज्ञानं वासोऽहरुष्णीशं रात्री केशा हरितौ प्रवर्तौ कल्मलिर्मणिः ।
भूतं च भविष्यच्च परिष्कन्दौ मनो विपथम् । मातरिश्वा च पवमानश्च
विपथवाहौ वातः सारथी रेष्मा प्रतोदः कीर्तिश्च यशश्च पुरःसरावैनं
कीर्तिर्गच्छत्या यशो गच्छति य एवं वेद ।

'He rose and walked towards the East. The Brihat and Rathantara hymns of the Sama Veda and all the gods followed him. Shraddha (faith) was the wife, the Sun the bard, Vijnana the dress, the day the turban, the night the hair, the Sun and moon the ear-rings, the stars the jewel, the past and the future the servants, the mind the chariot, Prana and Soma the horses, the wind the charioteer, the storm the reins. Fame and reputation were the

fore-runners. He gains fame and reputation who knows this'. What does all this mean? Surely, something other than what the language seems literally to say.

Or take these two:

त्रीणि पदा वि चक्रमे विष्णुर्गोपा अदाभ्यः ।
अतो धर्माणि धारयन् ।। (I-22-18)

'Vishnu, the invincible protector, moved three steps and in this way established (or maintained) the Dharmas' (the rules or laws which are essential for the welfare of the world)'. Some people interpret this as referring to the Sun, at dawn, midday and sunset but why is such a movement nowhere ascribed to the Sun by his proper name? In another verse in a similar context, it is said:

'the universe became full of the dust from his feet'. What would this mean?

ध्रुवं ज्योतिर्निहितं दृशये कं मनो जविष्ठं पतयत्स्वन्तः ।
विश्वे देवाः समनसः सकेता एकं क्रतुमभि वियन्तु साधु ।। (VI.9.5)

'Prajapati has placed in the hearts of all living things a steady light, more active even than the mind, so that it may be seen. All the gods, endowed with similar knowledge and of one mind, move towards one objective' (or have the same object of worship or come to the same sacrifice).

What again is the exact meaning of this verse,

यद्देवा अदः सलिले सुरंरब्धा अतिष्ठत ।
अत्रा वो नृत्यतामिव तीव्रो रेणुरपायत ।। (X.72.6)

'When you, O gods, stood closely clasped to one another in the Salila, a thick cloud of dust arose from you, as if you were dancing.' Salila as we know, is the philosophical term for that chaos, that undifferentiated matter, out of which this universe was born. It is often mistakenly translated as water, a misfortune which it shares with Apah.

I should like to dispose of here the elaborately built-up myth about Soma, the cult of Soma as it is called. It is said that the Aryans were addicted to this intoxicant and their gods, made in the image of their votaries, and were great drunkards. The Aryans were so fond of this beverage that they raised it to the status of a god. I do not accept this view. Let me bring to your notice the famous statement in X.85.3:

सोमं मन्यते पपिवान् यत् संपिंषन्त्योषधिम् ।
सोमं यं ब्रह्माणो विदुर्न तस्याश्नाति कश्चन ।।

'They grind the plant in their desire to drink Soma but no man of earth (no man who is of the earth, earthy, in the words of Shakespeare) drinks of the Soma, known to Brahmanas.'

Clearly, Soma here in the second half of the

verse refers to some exalted spiritual experience, cognised only by a chosen few who have shed off their earthliness, the weaknesses to which flesh is ordinarily heir. The Aryan people knew how to distil wine and they could get all the intoxication they needed from alcohol. The reason why Soma was drunk, (and it must be remembered that it was non-alcoholic and its preparation and drinking were attended by elaborate ceremonial of a religious nature) was different. We know that experiments are being carried out today in the West, particularly in the United States, on the psychological effects of certain drugs. Aldous Huxley has vividly described what he felt after taking mescalin. It is clear that Soma was taken for a similar purpose. The effects of taking such drugs have been described by various capable observers. Some drugs are said to produce an exaltation of spirit, an expansion of self, an infinite peace. They seem to grant a glimpse of the Reality, 'a moment of Truth', as it has been called.

I seem to have strayed far from the original purpose of this evening's discourse but, to my mind, this preliminary clearing of the ground is absolutely necessary.

One speaks about the Vedic gods but it seems to me that one very important and

relevant fact has failed to secure the attention it deserves. As we know, every hymn of the Rig Veda has its specific Devata, Chhanda, Rishi and Viniyoga. These particulars have to be remembered and are noted at the commencement of every Sukta or hymn as it is called in English. The Chhanda is the metre in which the hymn has been composed, the Rishi is the person who first saw it, as the technical expression goes, uttered it in his God-drunk condition or composed it, the Viniyoga is an indication of the purpose for, or the rite in, which it is to be employed. But what about the Devata? The word is of the feminine gender, the corresponding word for god being Deva. If it was intended to indicate the god who is the special object of the hymn, the person to whom the hymn is addressed, the proper word to use would have been देव. Why, in defiance of grammar and commonsense, use a feminine word for Indra, Rudra, Vishnu, Agni, Prajapati, and the other gods? Surely, whoever composed the verses or, later, edited the books must have been aware of the anomaly involved.

I believe that the clue to the nature of the Vedic gods can be found here, if anywhere. There are no philosophical discourses as in later literature but the seeds of philosophical

theories are already there. The universe is coeval with Time, but is subject to phases; a phase of vikasa or sanchara, creation, is followed after a time by a phase of sankocha, pratisanchara, dissolution, when the universe is reabsorbed in its original matrix. Just before a fresh creation, we are introduced to the eternal couple, Energy and that in which it resides, the Power and the possessor of Power. The two are really inseparable, like the two faces of a coin. It was no longer the Pure Brahma of Shankar but what he calls the Maya-Shabal Brahma; no longer pure consciousness but the Supreme Being endowed with consciousness, not knowledge but the knower. As the Nasadiya Sukta says:

आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकम्

'that one breathed without air with his Swadha'. Swadha is power, the word 'breathed' being used to indicate that that one was not inert but active. As the work of creation proceeds on various levels, this Primeval Energy assumes innumerable forms. We know some of them, the chemical and physical forces, muscular, nervous and psychic energy. There may be others of which we are not aware. What is called the Psi-force is already on the way to being recognised as a scientific fact. To all

these forms of energy, the Veda has given the name Devata. In the famous Devi Sukta (x. 125), this Shakti gives some account of what it is and what it can accomplish. The Devatas are not separate entities, the ocean of power is indivisible. But it focalises and polarises itself according to the needs of the situation, in various forms and various measures, just as in the sea there are ripples and huge waves simultaneously. No one can name or count all the manifestations of Energy but the Vedic Rishi concentrated his attention on some of the most important of them. The word 'Devata' has been quite correctly used in connection with the Suktas. What are being referred to are not individual gods at all but certain aspects of the Divine Power. When, for instance, a Rishi says that the Devata of his particular hymn is Rudra, he is stating that he is invoking through that Sukta the Raudri Shakti.

I must here bring in another word, the word Mantra, which I have so far carefully avoided. The verses in the Vedas and even the compositions in prose are called Mantras. A Mantra is really not a collection of words but of sounds, uttered in a certain pitch, a certain definite cadence and in a certain order. The words of the Mantra are simply conveni-

ent pegs on which to hang the sounds. The theory is that if the Mantra is properly recited, it sets up vibrations which start a disturbance in the sea of energy which is all around us as well as within us. Obviously, each combination of sounds would produce a disturbance of a different kind and intensity. Each such disturbance would focalise a particular form of energy. The reciter of the Mantra would thus get attuned to that form and use the energy he raises or arouses in this way. If the vibrations caused by a particular Mantra correspond to those which originally, i.e. at the tim of creation, caused the manifestation of the Raudri Shakti, then the reciter of the Mantra will be able to arouse that Shakti and mad use of it. The man who recites the Mantra or, at any rate, should be interested in the Devata likely to be awakened by the Mantra, not in any particular individual, god or otherwise. Whether all the passages in prose and verse comprised in the Veda are actually Mantras and possess the potency which Mantras are believed to possess is a different matter. This question can only be settled by carefully designed experiments. If the tests come out successful, this would mean that the Rishis whose names are associated with the Mantras learnt about these combinations of

sounds through a science whose secrets are lost to us today. In any case, we see that the feminine Devata is the right word to use in connection with a Mantra.

Who then are Indra, Vishnu, Rudra, Varuna and others whose names so frequently occur in the Vedas? One simple explanation is that they are all names of God in his various attributes. The explanation is not wholly wrong. If God is the Virat Purusa of the Purusa Sukta, the Being with an infinitude of heads, hands and feet, He is also of a certainty possessed of an infinitude of names. All names are His. If the Reality is One, although the wise call It by many names, Indra, Vayu, Yama are all certainly the names of the one God of the universe.

But this is not all. These words certainly have another meaning, more than one meaning in fact. There are contexts in which these names are obviously used for the manifestations of energy. Take the numerous descriptions of the wars between the gods and the demons, the interminable series of Devasura fights. It may be that these descriptions are reminiscent of actual wars waged by the Aryans but quite obviously the canvas has been used to portray the perpetual war between the forces of good and evil, in the wide cosmos as within

the heart of every man. The number of gods is thirty-three. There are the three classes of the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras and the twelve Adityas and Prajapati and Indra.* All these names could be shown to be personifications of forces which sustain the universe, both on the moral and the material planes. The Asuras, on the other hand, would be the disruptive forces, trying to gain ascendancy over the hearts of men and the world in which they live. And the Vedic Rishis at no time lost sight of the fact that there is a Oneness which underlines all diversities of light and dar[k]ness, good and evil. It is said:

यदचरस्तन्वा वावृधानो बलानीन्द्र प्रब्रुवाणो जनेषु।
मायेत् सा ते यानि युद्धान्याहुर्नाद्य शत्रुं ननु पुरा विवित्से ॥ (X.5

'O Indra, all the stories about your prowess and the fights in which you are said to have engaged are really false. You have no enemy today and had no enemy in the past.'

In so far as the so-called gods are the devatas, the forms of Energy, poetically per-

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*Vasus— आप, ध्रुव, सोम, धर(धव), अग्नि, वायु, प्रत्यूष, प्रभास।
Adityas— अर्य्यमा, पूषा, त्वष्टा, सविता, भग, धाता, विधाता, वरुण, मित्र, शक्र, विवस्वान्, विष्णु।
Rudras— अज, एक, अहिर्बुध्न्य, पिनाकी, महेश्वर, अपराजित, पाद् वृषाकपि, त्रासक, शंभु, हरण, ईश्वर।

sonified for describing world events or psychic experiences, they are not separate entities. Nor are they phenomena of nature like sunshine, rain, thunder and lightning, which exercised the crude mind of primitive man.

But these are not the only meanings which words like Indra, Agni, Marut carry. There are passages which cannot be properly interpreted unless these are treated as proper nouns, the names of distinct individuals, separate entities. These entities would be gods, in the sense in which this word is commonly used. What is the nature of these gods?

The gods are great souls who in previous cycles of creation performed austerities and dived deep down into their hearts in search of the mysteries that are गुहा=निहित, concealed in the cave. In this way, they not only acquired great knowledge but great power as well. At the time of the pratisanchar or sankocha, they are wrapped in the deep sleep of self-forgetfulness, when the great Power withdraws within Itself. But as the next creation approaches, there is a stirring and what was pure consciousness becomes conscious. The future universe first comes as a Thought in that cosmic mind, the Hiranyagarbha, and the Thought then takes shape.

स तूष्णीं मनसा ध्यायत्तस्य यस्यासीत्
तद्बृहत्समभवत् (ताण्डय ब्राह्मण, 7.6.1.)

'He meditated in silence; what was in His mind became large or expanded.'

Interesting as the subject of creation and dissolution is, I cannot pursue it further here. It will take me too far afield. Suffice it to say that as the process of materialisation grows apace, the great souls referred to above awaken and begin to function. They possess power and wisdom and use these gifts to help less developed souls, much as an elder brother leads a younger by the hand. They are stand[illegible] ing examples of what can be achieved by tap[illegible] (austerity), character, self-less work and [illegible] carrying out of Vedic injunctions. They [illegible] their powers for the good of others and are, [illegible] a matter of fact, named after the powers, the manifestations of energy, which they have specially mastered. He, for instance, who has specially developed his Vaishnavi shakti is called Vishnu. Others are similarly called Rudra, Indra etc. Whoever follows the same path will achieve the same status. Whosoever knows this will be able to control the gods, i.e. secure the help of the gods. That this help will not be available for immoral or disruptive purposes may be taken for granted because सत्यप्रिय हि देवाः, 'the gods verily love the Truth'.

They are also known as Sadhyas, the gods who are objects of approach, to whom prayers and requests can be addressed in the hope that they will extend their help to the deserving. Many Vedic hymns are definitely addressed to these gods. They reside in a region which is briefly designated as नाक (Naka). The three letters of which it is composed mean not un-happiness; Naka is the region of happiness, painlessness. It should be clearly understood that it has no location in any of the dimensions of space, it is a psychological state, [illegible]mbolically described as the region of light [illegible]d the gods are also symbolically described [illegible] dressed in light, refulgent, surrounded by [illegible] aura of bright rays. There is another class [illegible] beings known as Karma Devas. By virtue of their good deeds on earth, some men attain to the region of the gods, for some time sharing in the joys but not the powers and responsibilities of such a position. No prayers are addressed to them.

What I have stated above about the gods has to be pieced together from numerous passages spread all over Vedic literature. Such passages have sometimes to be interpreted in the light thrown on them by later literature. As has been said:

इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदार्थमुपबृंहयेत् ।
बिभेत्यल्पश्रुताद्वेदो मामयं प्रतरिष्यति ।।

'The meaning of the Veda should be elucidated with the help of the Itihasas and the Puranas; the Veda is afraid of a man of shallow scholarship; it is afraid that he will expose it to ridicule'.

I shall now place before you a few passages in which the gods are referred to

अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेन (X. 129.6)

'The gods are later than the beginning of the process of creation'.

ते ह नाकं महिमानः सचन्ते यत्र पूर्वे साध्याः सन्ति देवाः ॥
(I. 164.50)

'Those who perform the Vedic sacrifices have great experiences in Naka where dwell the old Sadhya gods'.

यस्त्वैवं ब्राह्मणो विद्यात्तस्य देवा असन् वशे

'The gods live in the control of the Brahman who knows this'.

य ईशिरे भुवनस्य प्रचेतसो विश्वस्य स्थातुर्जगतश्च मन्तवः ।
ते नः कृतादकृतादेनसस्पर्यद्या देवासः पिपृता स्वस्तये ।। (X.63.8)

'May the gods who are all-knowing, the lords of everything, animate and inanimate, help us to go beyond our sins, committed and uncom-

mitted (i.e. past and future), for our ultimate good.'

ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन् यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ।
यस्तन्न वेद किमृचा करिष्यति य इत् तद् विदुस्त इमे समासते।।(I.164.39)

'The Vedic Mantras are in that deathless highest world where the gods reside above the universe. What shall it avail a man merely to recite the Vedas if he does not know it (that world of the gods), they who know it alone derive real benefit from it'.

देवानां भद्रा सुमतिर्ऋजूयतां देवानां रातिरभि नो नि वर्तताम् ।
देवानां सख्यमुप सेदिमा वयं देवा न आयुः प्र तिरन्तु जीवसे ।। (I.89.2)

'May we get from the gods that wisdom which works for the good, may we get gifts from the gods, may we secure the friendship of the gods, may the gods give us long lives.'

नहि वो अस्त्यर्भको देवासो न कुमारकः ।
विश्वे सतोमहान्त इत् । (VIII.30.1)

'O gods, none of you is a child or a person of tender age. You are all equally great.'

Yama is one of the important Vedic gods. He is the Lord of Death. The few excerpts given below give an idea of the belief which the Aryans held about what happens after death. They also, incidentally, expose the ridiculousness of the charge that their notions about the soul were vague. They also throw

light on the nature of the gods. Yama is not a frightening individual. Like all the other gods, he is a helpful being who smoothens the path of the soul that finds itself suddenly transferred to a new environment. Even transmigration according to one's deeds is clearly indicated.

यमो नो गातुं प्रथमो विवेद नैषा गव्यूतिरपभर्तवा उ।
यत्रा नः पूर्वे पितरः परेयुरेना जज्ञानाः पथ्या अनु स्वाः॥ (X.14.2)
प्रेहि प्रेहि पथिभिः पूर्व्येभिर्यत्रा नः पूर्वे पितरः परेयुः।
उभा राजाना स्वधया मदन्ता यमं पश्यासि वरुणं च देवम्॥ (X.14.7)
इदं पितृभ्यो नमो अस्त्वद्य ये पूर्वासो य उपरास ईयुः।
ये पार्थिवे रजस्या निषत्ता ये वा नूनं सुवृजनासु विक्षु।। (X.15.2)
सूर्यं चक्षुर्गच्छतु वातमात्मा द्यां च गच्छ पृथिवीं च धर्मणा।
अपो वा गच्छ यदि तत्र ते हित मोषधीषु प्रति तिष्ठा शरीरैः॥ (X.16.[illegible]
अजो भागस्तपसा तं तपस्व तं ते शोचिस्तपतु तं ते अर्चिः।
यास्ते शिवास्तन्वो जातवेद स्ताभिर्वहैनं सुकृतामु लोकम् (X.16.4)

'Yama knows all about us. His path is indestructible. Everyone will have to follow the Path along which our forefathers have gone. Go, go, O soul, by the path along which went our old fathers. See the two kings, Yama and Varuna, pleased by the oblations offered to them.

'Salutations to the pitris, to those who went before and those who went after, to those who have come to earth and those who are in the realms of the blessed. May thy eyes go to the sun and thy breath to the wind. Go to the

heavens and to the earth, according to thy deeds. Go to water, if thy good lies in this, or live in the bodies of plants. O Agni, may thy rays shine on that part of him which is unborn (i.e. eternal). Take him to the regions of the virtuous with thy benevolent body.'

The existence of lower forms, the elementals, was admitted. There are frequent references to them. They were exorcised away at the commencement of every sacred rite. Even when the dead body was taken for cremation, they were asked to leave:

अपेत वीत वि च सर्पतात:, (X.14.9)

Go away from this place'.

Let me recapitulate now. At the time when we first meet the Aryan people on the Indian stage, they were culturally in what is called the Vedic period. From the testimony of Vedic literature, mainly the Rig Veda, we learn that though these men were economically more or less in the pastoral stage, in spiritual matters they had left that stage far behind. They had evolved techniques of meditation and had had visions of that Reality which is the substratum of the phenomenal world. Such experience is really in-communicable and considerable use was made of symbolical language to convey the Truth as far as possible.

The universe appeared to them as something like the perpetual throbbing, the ceaseless undulation, characteristic of the Reality that is, but may not be described. It has two aspects, Consciousness and Svadha, the potentiality of becoming conscious and the potentiality of movement. At times, the potentiality becomes an actuality; at other times, it withdraws within itself. During the periods of what may be called expansion, the Svadha assumes myriad forms. These forms, only some of which can be enumerated, are called Devatas. It is possible to attune oneself to these waves of energy. The recitation, in certain specified manners, of conjunctions of certain syllables produces the dual effect of producing a certain rhythm in the nervous system of the reciter, inducing a corresponding psychic state and simultaneously creating a kind of power-circle round him. There is a kind of condensation of power, a focalisation of it, at the point and the reciter is able to canalize a part of the vast ocean of Energy which pulsates all around him and within him. This is the theory of Mantra and Devata. How far it is true is a matter for experimentation. At any rate, the term Devata used in connection with the Vedic hymns does not mean gods.

The Rishis had naturally to use indirect

methods of expression in describing spiritual experiences and subtle philosophical truths in dealing with matters like creation, dissolution, etc. It is said: परोक्षप्रिया हि देवाः 'the gods speak in indirect language'. For this purpose, they have found the use of words like Rudra, Agni, Prajapati, Indra very handy. In some cases, these names stand for the Devatas personified. In others, however, the meaning is very difficult and intricate. It is this part of Vedic exegesis which stands in need of research. The meanings, intricate as they were, were apparently well-known; they are carried through all over the Samhitas and the Brahmanas, including the Upanishads. None of the old commentaries will do. They do not possess the key. I think it was Aravinda Ghosh who once observed that he was fortunate in that he had not read Sayana.

There is a class of gods, however, of whom the principal ones number thirtythree:

ये त्रिंशति त्रयस्परो देवासो बर्हिरासदन् ।
विदन्नह द्वितासनन् । (VIII,28,1)

'May the thirty-three gods sitting on seats made of kusha grass know us and give us wealth.'

They are called Ajana or Sadhya Devas. They are exalted souls who performed great auste-

rities and underwent long spiritual disciplines, in this way unfolding their powers and acquired great control over nature, being able to use forces of whose very existence ordinary men are not aware. They use their powers to help humanity onwards. They reward and they punish, all with the sole object of setting man firmly on the path of spiritual regeneration.

सुविज्ञानं चिकितुषे जनाय सच्चासच्च वचसी पस्पृधाते ।
तयोर्यत् सत्यं यतरदृजीयस्तदित् सोमोऽवति हन्त्यासत् ॥

(VII. 104. 12)

'The wise know that Truth and untruth are always competing against each other. Of the two that which is true and straight is protected by Soma, he destroys the other'. They resolve men's difficulties and help them in acquiring knowledge that would otherwise not be easily available. Indra, for instance, was one of the fathers of the Science of Medicine. What is necessary is that they should be approached with Shraddha, faith. Prayers are addressed to them. They are the gods of the Aryans of the Rig Vedic period.

By the performance of the Vedic Yajnas, the Devatas are awakened on the one hand and the gods satisfied on the other. The performance of the Yajna is, so to say, the accep-

tance of the truth of the principle explained in the Purusa Sukta. The Virat Purusa is the Cosmic Person of whose body everything that exists is a part, organically united with all other parts. The happiness and pain of one depends upon the happiness of all. Man enjoys prosperity in this life because myriad beings, of most of whom he is not aware, work, many unknowingly, to make him prosper. He is under a heavy load of debt to them all. He cannot repay the debt but he can at least acknowledge it. The gods are not hungry for the offerings made to them but the offerings and the spirit behind them give them moral strength in securing the cosmic purpose.

II. THE PAURANIC PERIOD

THE PAURANIC PERIOD is the age when the principal Puranas were written down. The work of amending and editing the books went on for a considerable period as is clear from internal evidence but the main texts seem to have been completed from the third to the seventh century. This period roughly corresponds to what is called the Gupta period of Indian History.

There can be no doubt that this was the most brilliant epoch in the history of the land. The extent of territory over which Ashoka ruled was probably larger but the Imperial Guptas, as Western scholars call them, with their frontier outposts established on the वक्षुतट, the banks of the Oxus in Central Asia, maintained peace within the country and enjoyed the wholesome respect of neighbours beyond their frontiers for a much longer period than the Mauryas. And, in any case, their writ ran over the whole of Northern India including Afghanistan.

It was not only an age of internal cohesion and military prowess. Perhaps at no other time in our history has there been witnessed such

an efflorescence of our genius in the fields of Art, Science and Literature, both sacred and profane. Some of the best Buddhist and Jaina sculptures which excite admiration to this day were executed in the time of the Guptas. The rulers were Hindus but tolerance is one of the basic tenets of Hinduism. Many of the masterpieces of Sanskrit literature were written in those days, as were works on Medicine and Mathematics. The country's independence, personal liberty, religious toleration, peace and prosperity and a life of full aesthetic enjoyment could not but produce in the citizen of this great land an expansion of his personality and great confidence in himself and his fellowmen. He was proud of his country. As the Vishnu Purana says:

गायन्ति देवाः किल गीतकानि,
धन्यास्तु ये भारत भूमिभागे ।
स्वर्गापवर्गास्पदमार्गभूते
भवन्ति भूयः पुरुषाः सुरत्वात् ॥

'The gods in heaven say that those among them will be fortunate indeed who, at the end of their sojourn in heaven, will be re-born as men in Bharata, which is the gateway both to heaven and self-realisation.'

And he was proud of himself, of being a

human being for, as the Markandeya Purana says:

मनुष्यः कुरुते यत्तु, तन्न शक्यं सुरासुरैः

'That which man can do is impossible of achievement by gods or demons.'

The following lines indicate the measure of his self-reliance:

उद्योगिनं पुरुषसिंहमुपैति लक्ष्मीः ।
दैवेन देयमिति कापुरुषा वदन्ति ॥

'Prosperity comes to the lion-like man who strives for it. They are cowards who say that it is the gift of destiny.'

It was against this back-ground that religious thought and practice underwent those changes which appear to distinguish religion in the Puranas from Vedic religion. But there is one other important factor of the background of which note must be made. The rise to power of the Sunga dynasty saw the dethronement of Buddhism as India's state religion. Pusyamitra, the founder of the dynasty, performed the Aswamedha sacrifice, so did Samudra Gupta. Gradually, Buddhism lost its hold on the people. Nevertheless, it left its mark prominently on the popular mind. The age of the Vedic Yajnas was definitely dead, never again to be revived. Jainism, with its insistence on Ahimsa, also contributed to bring

about this state of affairs. Again, the Vedic sacrifices were mainly reserved for the higher castes but Buddhism had taught the eligibility of all men for spiritual advancement. And this sentiment stayed, even when Buddhism faded away as a living force. There is a third fact also, which has to be kept in mind. According to the followers of the Vedic Religion, the Vedas are the final authority, not standing in need of any proof, in all matters, spiritual and mundane. The Rishis were not the authors of the Mantras; in the state of samadhi, they became en rapport with the Cosmic Spirit and got visions of the Reality and the Truths underlying It and manifested by It. The Buddhist and Jain religions had no such authority on which to fall back. They were founded by individuals, spiritually exalted personalities. But what one man had done another man can do. Other men could also claim to have reached the same pinnacle. These religions admit the possibility but lay down that it will only be after several millenia that such an event will take place. In the meantime, the teachings of Gautama in one case and Mahavira in the other must be implicitly followed. Thus the personal authority of the founder of the religion became very important with them. Neither Buddhism nor Jainism posits a

God, therefore, Buddha and Mahavira came to acquire very nearly a position which in other religions might be reserved for God. The transition from veneration to their memories to making visible representations of them was an easy one. Early images of the Buddha, as we know, do not essay to show his features in detail. His feet are there and at the height where the head should be there is a halo. Gradually, the full figure came to be sculptured. Thus, in the Gupta period making images of the Buddha and the Jain Tirthankaras was the prevailing fashion. The common people appreciated this practice and it enabled the highest in the land as well as the lowest to give a tangible shape to their piety.

It was against this background that Hinduism as a Religion had to function. Religious thought in India has never been static; it has shown a remarkable power of assimilating new trends, and, while keeping intact its main principles, to adapt itself to new environments. As always happens in such cases, theologians take up the work of recasting the frame-work at the top but popular opinion, particularly at the lower levels, a living thing as it is, spontaneously undergoes changes, which the theologian has to rationalise and incorporate.

Vedic Yajnas had been given up because

they had degenerated into lifeless rituals accompanied by a senseless massacre of innocent animals. The authority of the Vedas was still recognised as final and absolute but the study of the Vedas, which was so necessary for the proper performance of Yajnas, did not receive the same attention as before. Two results followed. The Devatas, who were so to say the presiding deities of the Mantras, were neglected. Agni was the medium through whom all oblations were offered. Indra was the greatest of the Devatas. Now, Indra, Agni, Vayu, all lost their importance. What is more, the distinction between Deva and Devata came gradually to be slurred over. People forgot the Devatas and remembered only the Devas. The powerful galaxy of Buddhas and Bodhi-sattvas and the Tirthankaras had no counter-parts in the older religion. Hinduism at its re-birth after the withdrawal of Buddhism filled the canvas with the Devas who were endowed with more aggressive personalities than they had previously possessed. The principle that the gods were persons who had acquired their present positions through great austerities was firmly established. The complementary principle that after enjoying the fruits of their good deeds in heaven, the majority of them would have to come back

to the earth was established equally firmly. This principle is expressed in the following words in the Bhagavad Gita: क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति '(They) enter the regions of mortals on the expiry of the merit of their good deeds.' Indra still remained the Lord of the Devas but, three of them, Vishnu, Rudra and Prajapati, were held to be superior to him. The other gods quite naturally occupied much lower positions.

The rise to supreme position of the Trinity, namely, Brahma, as Prajapati came generally to be called, Shiva, the popular name of Rudra and Vishnu was an interesting development. The demotion of Indra and most of the other gods created a vacuum and these three came gradually to fill it. About Brahma, there was not much difficulty. As I showed yesterday, he was in a class by himself among the thirty-three gods. In the Vedas also he was recognised as the Creator. The other name by which he is known is हिरण्यगर्भ, Hiranyagarbha. His importance was clear but while his position was high, he did not become much of an object of worship. Having created the Universe and the laws governing it, ऋत and सत्य he had little more to do with it, and therefore, people probably thought that it was no use

running to him for help in their little difficulties.

The second member of the Trinity was Vishnu. The Universe having came into existence, someone had to look after it. Vishnu was clearly marked out as the Preserver, the person who saw that the machine did not go out of order. In several places in the Vedas, he is called गोपा, the protector, e.g.

विष्णुर्गोपाः परमं पाति पाथः, प्रिया धामान्यमृता दधानः ।(III,55.10)

'Vishnu, the protector, protects the highest place, holding (or supporting) the dear lights (the desired regions of Light)'. Or, the Mantra already quoted yesterday:

त्रीणि पदा विचक्रमे, विष्णुर्गोपा अदाभ्यः, अतो धर्माणि धारयन्

'Vishnu, the invincible protector, moved three steps and in this way established (or maintained) the Dharmas (the laws or rules according to which the universe is governed, which ensure its welfare).'

In the Veda, he is called

इन्द्रावरज, इन्द्रस्य युज्यः सखा and उपेन्द्र

The first two terms mean respectively Indra's younger brother and Indra's dear friend who always acts according to the latter's wishes. Upendra means a person who is a secondary Indra, who can, as it were deputise for Indra.

The three terms indicate how close he was to Indra, but subordinate to him. It was, therefore, easy for him to step up and assume the position of supremacy among the gods, when Indra stepped down. Unlike Brahma, Vishnu was naturally an object of worship: man wants protection, health, wealth and a hundred other objects every day.

But the Universe does not go on for ever. A time arrives when sankocha takes place, the primeval power withdraws its manifestations within itself. Then Rudra, the Destroyer, comes in, the third member of the Trinity. Like Brahma, he also need not have been an object of worship. But he is and there is a strong reason for this. He has other names, for instance, Shiva and Shankar, meaning the good, He who causes ultimate good. It does seem anomalous that the Destroyer should also be called the source of good, happiness, prosperity. Some Western scholars have solved the problem in a very simple manner. They have assumed that these euphemistic names were given to Rudra with a view to pacify and flatter him. This is an ingenious way out of the difficulty but very superficial, all the same.

The Hindu concept of सृष्टि and प्रलय creation and dissolution, is very different from

that of the Semitic religions. Neither depends on the fiat of an absolute God. The law of Karma being eternal, everyone has to work out the effects of his actions. Creation and dissolution are only phases in the life of the Universe which is beginningless and endless as God Himself. Dissolution is similar to sleep. Individuals sleep but their minds do not intermingle in that state: on waking up, each takes up his own thread. A similar thing happens on a cosmic scale. A kind of entropy overtakes the universe which enters a state similar to that of sleep. But a new universe has necessarily to come into existence again. There can neither be a permanent residence in heaven nor a permanent exile to hell. Thus dissolution is not a terrifying prospect at all and Rudra, the embodiment of those forces which bring about dissolution, is not a demon who gives vent to his sadistic temperament in an orgy of destruction.

Let us consider, for a moment, the life of the individual. The cycle of births and deaths goes on. It is beginningless but not necessarily endless. No one can say which came first, the tree or the seed, but if the seed is roasted, there will be no tree. Similarly, for the individual who achieves Moksha, self-realisation, Sansara, the seemingly eternal journey from

one birth to another, will come to an end. For him, the universe will come to an end. The end of the universe will coincide with the achievement of supreme bliss. For the individual then, Rudra will have become Shiva. That is why, the prayer goes याते रुद्र शिवा तनूरघोर 'Oh Rudra, that face of thine which is Shiva and peaceful' that face show to me. Since self-realisation comes from austerity and the practice of Yoga, Shiva is looked upon as the ideal Yogi, the Yogishwar, lord of Yogis, par excellence.

It was natural that Rudra should acquire a position as important as Vishnu. If there is a difference, it is brought out by the well-known verse of Bhartrihari:

> एका कान्ता सुन्दरी वा दरी वा
> एको वासः पत्तने वा वने वा ।
> एकं मित्रं भूपतिर्वा यतिर्वा
> एको देवः केशवो वा शिवो वा ॥

This, briefly, implies that those who want worldly prosperity, power, happiness, worship Vishnu while those who want to probe the inner mysteries of the ego and are prepared to deny themselves the pleasures of life worship Shiva.

One can contrast even today the comparatively austere atmosphere of a Shiva temple

with the regal paraphernalia which form part of the worship in a Vishnu temple.

The rise of Vaishnavism and Shaivism to predominance and the sinking into comparative insignificance of the Vedic rites and Vedic gods must have taken time but this period has been telescoped in those Pauranic stories which give us a picture of the change. As an example may be mentioned the famous story in which Krishna is said to have stopped the practice of performing Yajnas in which Indra used to be approached for giving rain. Indra is enraged and sends down a huge downpour from which Krishna protects Braj by lifting Govardhan hill on the tip of his little finger. Indra is finally defeated. There are other stories in which at the hands of Shiva or Vishnu the discomfiture of Bhrigu, as the representative of the priestly class, is vividly portrayed.

At present there are 18 Puranas and 18 upa-Puranas. The names of the principal Puranas are indicated in the following Sloka:

भद्वयं मद्वयं चैव, ब्रत्रयं वचतुष्टयम् ।
अनापलिंगकूस्कानि पुराणानीति कथ्यते ।।

2 भ's=भागवत and भविष्य; 2 म's=मत्स्य and मार्कण्डेय; 3 ब्र's=ब्रह्म, ब्रह्माण्ड and ब्रह्मवैवर्त; 4 व's= वायु, विष्णु, वाराह and वामन; अ=अग्नि, ना=नारद, पत् पद्म; लिं=लिंग; ग=गरुड; कू कर्म, स्क=स्कन्द.

There are two opinions about whether the देवी भागवत or the श्रीमद्भागवत is meant by the term भागवत. I am personally inclined to the former view. The authorship of all the Puranas is directly or indirectly ascribed to Vedavyasa. It is difficult to say what part of the original Purana that he taught to his disciples सूत and others, has really come down to us. Internal evidence shows that there has been considerable edition and interpolation. Apart from the social, historical and geographical material that is plentifully available in those books, they contain illuminating discourses on Yoga and philosophy besides containing discussions on subjects like Grammar, Medicine, Astrology, Astronomy, Law, Politics and a number of other subjects. One thing is common to all of them. They all sing the praises of Shiva and Vishnu and deprecate the worship of Indra and the other Vedic gods. Some of this kind of composition appears to be very shallow, almost silly. The writers found that the easiest way of praising their own favourite god was to show that Indra the king of the Vedic gods was a person of unsteady character, avaricious, jealous, sexually depraved. Shiva and Vishnu are sometimes made by their admirers to act in a manner

which would put any decent man to shame. In the famous, or shall I call it infamous, story of Tulasi, Vishnu deceitfully robs Jalandhar's wife of her chastity. In another story, this time in the Shiva Purana, Shiva appears naked before the wives of the Rishis and some of them begin even to worship him, their husbands being engaged in Yajnas and Tapasya in the meanwhile. This may possibly be a symbolic description of the introduction of 'Linga' worship which probably scandalised the old priestly class but surely a better imagery could have been employed.

The important Vedic Yajnas had been given up and the Devatas had been almost forgotten but this did not mean that the Para-Shakti also had lost her hold. All that had happened was that, in accordance with the prevailing trend, she also had been anthropomorphised. The three main forms, the Brahmi, the Vaishnavi and the Raudri, had become the three Mahavidyas, the Maha Saraswati, the Maha Lakshmi and the Maha Kali respectively. These worked in and through Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and were called the spouses of these gods. The other gods also had their spouses in the same way. For instance, the word शचि is often used in the plural in the Veda as referring to Indra's powers. Now it has become a proper noun, the

name of Indra's spouse. But there is no real confusion of thought about who these Devis, goddesses, are. The fact is never lost sight of that they are the manifestations of one Supreme Power whch is the matrix of the whole universe in its multiplicity of phases. There is a beautiful story in the Devi Bhagwat which illustrates this.

Once the gods of our Brahmanda, our section of the Universe, began to wonder if there is anything beyond their realm. They began systematically to explore it. They reached the farthest point known to them but the universe seemed to stretch beyond it. Impelled by curiosity they moved on. As they proceeded on what seemed to be an endless journey, they met thousands of gods, some much more powerful than themselves, all proceeding in the same direction. Gradually, in the dim distance a light appeared which grew dazzling every moment. At the same time, they began to sense a subtle change in themselves. What was a pin-point of light assumed the form of a woman, more beautiful than the wildest imagination. As they approached her, they were all changed into women and lost their separate identities. Rushing on, they were absorbed into her. After an eternity, they re-emerged from her and, as they receded from

her, they regained their old forms and their sense of separate identity.

A variant of the same theme is provided in a story in the Markandeya Purana. When Maha Saraswati was engaged in a fight with the Asura Shumbha, the spouses of all the gods appeared on the scene and ranged themselves by her side. Shumbha taunted her by saying that it was no act of courage for so many to fight against one. The Devi tells him that she is one and alone and nothing exists beside herself. These were only her manifestations, not separate entities. Promptly all the Devis who had been there a moment before entered into her, leaving her alone as before.

Leaving aside the Tantrika forms of worship which would take me too far afield, the worship of Devi in one form or another was as prevalent as the worship of Vishnu and Shiva. Sometimes, she was shown as the consort of one of the gods, but very often she was alone, as in the great temples dedicated to Kamakhya, Kali, Amba, Minakshi, Kanya Kumari and Vindhyavasini.

Some important changes followed naturally from this new trend in religion to emphasise the fact that the gods are persons. Buddha and Mahavira were historical figures and it was easy to make images of them. But no one had

seen any of the gods. Sculptors and writers had, therefore, to draw upon their imaginations and describe their persons or make such images of them as appeared to be most appropriate symbols of their qualities. Sensible men knew that the numerous hands and feet and weapons were not actualities but mere symbols but the danger was always there of the unthinking looking upon them as actual features of the gods. The simple concept of Naka, referred to in the previous lecture, was also expanded. An elaborate hierarchy of lokas, regions presided over by the gods, was built up. This, again, was meant to be symbolical but the lavish details with which the descriptions were embellished by successive writers made them out to be actual regions of space, instead of states of consciousness.

By and large, it seems to me that, while during this period the gods were made more personal, more responsive to human weal and woe, brought closer to humanity, simultaneously their stature was considerably lowered in certain respects. Even the highest gods, Vishnu and Shiva, were not spared by their foolish admirers who foisted their own compositions on Vyasa. Probably, Shakti is the only exception to this unfortunate process.

Attention must be drawn to some interesting

additions that were made to the Pantheon during this time. Of course, such additions were not deliberate. The popular imagination was caught by certain figures and then the theologian had to rationalise them and find a suitable niche for them. I do not propose to devote attention to what might be called marginal accretions, entities like Shitala, the presiding spirit of small-pox, and generally representing other epidemics also or Naga, the serpent. These never rose very high, even though they received a measure of worship from all classes. Such worship was more or less like a sensible insurance policy.

The first entrant into the family of gods of whom notice has to be taken is Ganesha. I have no doubt that he is of non-Aryan origin. Not only his physical features but the various stories about his origin prove that he was not counted among the gods in the beginning but managed to procure membership of the Divine Society at a later date in some peculiar and generally distressing circumstances. We first meet him as a Vinayaka, an evil spirit who has to be exorcised and prevented from disturbing the performance of a Yajna or bringing disease and distress to a household. Having once gained admission, however, his promotion was rapid. He became the patron of

scholarship and the dispenser of all good and, through Mahayana Buddhism, extended his sway over Tibet, China and Japan.

Another of the gods is Surya. It is true that Surya figures among the Vedic Devatas and gods. It is said in the Vedas सूर्य्य आत्माजग तस्तस्थुषश्च "Surya is the soul of all that is sentient and insentient". With the giving up of Yajnas, the worship of Surya in the Vedic manner naturally fell into the back-ground. But when the Sakas came to India and settled down here, they brought their priests, the Magi, the Maga Brahmans of the Puranas, and their god Surya with them. His early images show him dressed in a shalwar and high boots. Gradually, as he became acclimatised as it were, he shed off his outlandish accoutrements till he became as we see him in his images today. There could be little difficulty in establishing his identity with the Surya of the Vedas.

One more example, that of Hanuman. Obviously he came on the stage with the spread of the story of Rama. His worship is a measure of the gratefulness of the people for his selfless devotion to Rama and his cause.

No matter how much the observance of Vedic rites may have fallen into neglect, respect for the Vedas is strong in the Hindu mind. It is a part of the inherited sub-con-

scious mind of our people. We are never happy unless a religious ceremony can somehow be linked up with the Vedic texts and no one seems to be an appropriate object of worship unless some Vedic Mantra can be found to cover him. In the case of Surya, there was no difficulty, there being any number of Mantras referring to him as Surya, Pusha, Aryama, Bhaga, etc. Ganesha presented a great difficulty. An uneasy solution has been found by tacking on the Mantra गणानां त्वा to him. This Mantra came from the Ashwamedha ceremony and the only connecting link seems to be the word गणपति. The case of Hanuman is still more difficult. All that can be said is that he is वातपुत्र, son of Vayu, and on the principle that आत्मा वै जायते पुत्रः, a person is born in the form of his son,' the Mantras that are applicable to Vayu may be taken to be applicable to Hanuman. Even when seemingly eclipsed, the Vedas give religious light to the Hindu.

What is true of Ganesh and Surya is also true of what might be called the presiding deities of the grahas, Mars, Jupiter, etc. They also began to be worshipped and Vedic Mantras were found for them. How laboured some of these efforts were is vividly brought out by

the Mantra for Shani, Saturn. The Mantra is:

शं नो देवीरभिष्टय, आपो भवन्तु पीतये,
शंयोरभिस्रवन्तु नः

'May the divine waters be for our good, may they fall for our good and the warding off of evils from us'. There is nothing in all this which has the remotest connection with Saturn. Apparently, the Mantra was selected because of the similarity of sound between its first two words Shanno and Shani.

In passing, attention may be drawn to the position acquired in this period by the cow. Already in the Vedic period she was considered अघ्नया that which should not be killed. But she became an object of worship and veneration only during the Pauranic age. The colonists who went out to settle in the Eastern islands do not seem to have known the cow as mother.

This wild growth of gods and goddesses, some of them of very doubtful origin and very tenuous connection with the fountain-head of Hinduism, namely the Vedas, might lead one to imagine that Vedic tradition was completely forgotten. Natural as this idea might appear, it is completely wrong. A remarkable continuity was maintained with the Vedic period. Many of the incidents re-

ferred to in the Vedas in a brief sentence or two appear in the Puranas in the form of a story filled with details without which the statement in the Veda might appear to be bald. Some of these stories were presumably parts of the national heritage, coming down from father to son and probably preserved in folk-lore and folk-song, in other cases the details might be the result of the fertile imaginations of the poets who took a hand in composing the Puranas as we find them today. Take, for instance, the story of the वामनावतार. Vishnu, as the dwarf, Vamana, is said to have measured the visible universe in three steps. Quite clearly this story derives from those Mantras in the Rig Veda which refer to Vishnu having taken three steps. Two of these have already been noted earlier namely,

इदं विष्णुर्वि चक्रमे, त्रेधा निदधे पदम् समूढमस्य पांसुरे।
त्रीणि पदा वि चक्रमे, विष्णुर्गोपा अदाभ्यः। अतो धर्माणि धारयन्।

the words अतो धर्माणि धारयन् hence, or in this way, upholding the Dharmas, giving support to the Pauranic story in which Vishnu is reported to have traversed the universe in three steps for re-establishing the rule of Dharma which was threatened by Raja Bali achieving ascendency even over the gods.

The clue to many references in the Vedas

can only be found in the Puranas. Two of the important gods in the Vedas are the Asvi twins but the reason why they should be so called is cleared up only in some of the Puranas where they are shown to be the sons of the Sun by Sanjna who had assumed the form of a mare. The Puranas generally refer to them as Asvini Kumaras, sons of the mare, and they are described as the physicians of the gods.

Sometimes a single passage from Vedic literature seems to be the starting point or, shall I say, highly condensed version of several Pauranic myths. Let me give an example. The third Anuvak of the first prapathaka of the Taittiriya Brahmana says:

> आपो वा इदमग्रे सलिलमासीत् । तेन प्रजापतिरश्राम्यत्
> कथमिदं स्यादिति । सोऽपश्यत् पुष्करपर्णं तिष्ठत्। सोऽमन्यत्।
> अस्ति वै तत्। यस्मिन्निदमधितिष्ठतीति। स वराहोरुप-
> कृत्वोपमन्यमज्जत्। स पृथिवीमध आर्च्छत्।
> तस्या उपहत्योदमज्जत्।

'In the beginning this was all Apah, as salila. Then Prajapati who was about to create the universe began to think, how shall I create the universe? Then he saw a lotus leaf. He thought "There must be something on which this is supported". He then assumed the form of a boar and dived. Down below he saw the earth. He took it up and came out of the water.' Here we clearly see a brief story which later

blossomed out as two well-known stories in the Puranas. The first story says that after every pralaya, dissolution, the material of which the universe is composed is reduced to its most elementary form. Its name in that condition is Apah and its form is called salila, undifferentiated matter. Both of these words are unfortunately translated as water by the unthinking. It is also referred to as रजांसि, particles of dust, what might be called cosmic dust in the language of today. It is said that in this Salila, Vishnu sleeps, the Primal Energy functioning as तमस, inertia. When the time of the next creation comes, a lotus flower comes out of his navel. Brahma sits on the flower. The flower is, of course, supported by Vishnu. It should be kept in mind that Vishnu means 'that which permeates' and is obviously used here in the sense of the Universal Spirit. The other story is that of Varaha Avatar. Hiranyaksha, the Asura, took hold of the earth and carried it down to the bottom of the waters. Vishnu took the form of a boar, dived down and brought it up again. The language used in all these cases is, of course, symbolic; words like lotus and boar have no doubt been used for special reasons.

Saraswati was the name of the river that formed practically the eastern-most boundary

of Sapta Sindhava, the homeland of the Vedic Aryans. It has now disappeared for all practical purposes but its memory persists. Saraswati was also a Vedic devata. Many Mantras are connected with her. While many of the Vedic gods have been retired into comparative oblivion, Saraswati not only retains her place but has, perhaps, acquired greater importance. She is one of the three Maha-Vidyas, the promoter of good thoughts, and the goddess of learning and the fine arts, particularly music. She is always represened as वीणापुस्तकधारिणी 'having a book in her hand and holding the Vina'. This aspect of her has been foreshadowed in Vedic Mantras. For instance:

चोदयित्री सूनृतानां चेतन्ती सुमतीनाम्, (I.3.11)
यज्ञं दधे सरस्वती ।

'This Yajna is supported by Saraswati who prompts men to speak true words and makes them know what are good thoughts'. Some of the names by which she is generally known are also mentioned:

आ नो यज्ञं भारती तूयमेत्विळा मनुष्वदिह चेतयन्ती ।
तिस्रो देवीर्बर्हिरिदं स्योनं सरस्वती स्वपसः सदन्तु ॥
(X. 110. 8)

'May Bharati, Ira, Saraswati, the three goddesses who make known to men what should be done come quickly to this Yajna and take their seats here'. These are not really three

separate entities; at least by the time of the Puranas they have merged into one.

The practice of looking upon rivers, mountains, forests as having presiding spirits came definitely into vogue at this time but it has an ancient lineage. Vedic times also knew the custom, vide:

पूषा विष्णुर्हवनं मे सरस्वत्यवन्तु सप्त सिन्धवः ।
आपो वातः पर्वतासो वनस्पतिः शृणोतु पृथिवी हवम् ।

(VIII. 54. 4)

'May Pusha, Vishnu, Saraswati, the seven rivers protect my *havana*. May the waters, the wind, the mountains, the trees, the earth hear my chant'.

No description of the state of religions in those days would be complete without a reference to the theory of Avataras. Vishnu is said to have come down to earth several times, assuming various forms for the performance of specific acts, all connected with his specific functions as Protector or Preserver of the Universe. His coming down to earth in no way affects his fulness of presence or the plenitude of his power in his own loka, Vaikuntha. The word has been thus defined:

देवानां विशेषतो विष्णोर्मूर्त्यन्तरेण
पूर्णांशावशेषरूपेण पृथिव्यामवतरणम् ।

'The descent to earth of the gods, specially Vishnu, in another form, with his fullness re-

maining intact'. Of course, any other god or goddess could manifest himself or herself as an Avatara but Vishnu is the person with whose name the word has the strongest associations. Normally, the universe manages itself but sometimes the active intervention of Vishnu becomes necessary. I cannot claim to speak with authority but, personally, I have not so far found any Vedic support for the theory. There are numerous instances of direct intervention, particularly by Indra and the Asvi twins, but this is not the same thing as an Avatara taking a direct part in world affairs.

It is said that the number of Avataras is infinite but twenty-four of these are more important than the others. Of these, ten are really considered the most important. The last Avatara of the series is yet to come. Not all the Avataras are human.

It is not necessary for the purpose of this lecture to discuss the theory of Avataras at great length. There were the memories of centuries-old experiences of the race, the great deluge, for example; there were stories of the Tirthankaras and the Buddhas who in a variety of bodies, human and non-human, served humanity and preached Dharma; there were reminiscences of great historical personalities

and events of great importance and there was the belief that Vishnu, as the Preserver, would have to intervene at times to ensure that disaster did not overtake the world. As Sri Krishna says in the Gita:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥

'O Arjuna, whenever there is decline of Dharma and the rise of Adharma, I create myself (I take an earthly body). For the protection of the virtuous, the destruction of the wicked and the re-establishment of Dharma, I am born from time to time.'

This is a very succinct summarisation of the theory of Avataras.

There are instances of direct intervention by the High Powers outside the pale of Avataras, as it were. There is the example of Mahalakshmi, coming to battle with Mahishasura, who had defeated all the gods. These cases are parallel to those described in the Vedas. But the theory of Avataras was designed to cover not only such one-act demonstrations of Divine Power and solicitude for the universe but the lives of persons like Parashurama, Rama and Krishna, extended over long years

and were full of incidents of great emotional content.

The theory must have taken centuries to gain general acceptance. Even now it cannot be said to be an essential part of Hinduism. But it made several important additions to the Pantheon. Rama and Krishna, and to a lesser extent Nrisimha, are now objects of worship in their own right. Of course, it is admitted that they are incarnations or Avataras of Vishnu but a worshipper does not remind himself of this fact all the time. Taken all together, I am sure that there are more temples dedicated to Rama and Krishna than to Vishnu. Similarly, poetry, painting and sculpture have received more inspiration from Vishnu's Avataras than from him directly.

Buddha had had a long spell of eventful life. His influence had been such that he could not be ignored. So he was admitted among the Avataras. The question of finding a reference to him in the Vedas did not arise because of the fiction that Vishnu had deliberately preached the uselessness of Vedic rites to deceive the Asuras. But Rama and Krishna were different. No reference to them is found in the Samhitas and yet somehow some association with Vedic literature had to be established. It is in this way, and no other, that

the existence of books like the Ramatapani, Gopalatapani, Nrisimhatapani and Ganesha-tharvasirsa Upanishads can be explained. They are definitely new compositions.

The principle of direct intervention led to an important change in religious attitudes. The Vedic Mantras, whether dealing with Devatas or Devas, were used with confidence in their power; it was believed that certain results were bound to ensue if the Mantras were properly recited and the other ceremonies properly performed. Even when a hymn had the form of a prayer, it had a compelling power. Now, when the Vedic Yajnas were put into the background and some of the gods, old as well as new, had developed into powerful personalities, prayers really became prayers, because so much depended upon the grace and the goodwill of the gods. A new type of devotional literature came into existence, as part of the Puranas, as well as independently. It is one of the peculiarities of India that nothing is annulled or rescinded; what has to be given up is quietly dropped, with the apology that the present age is not suitable for it, that the people of the present day are not good enough for it and that the same object can be served in some other way. The Vaishnava Puranas affirm that

Vedic Yajnas and the practice of austerities are not meant for these days; devotion to Vishnu is simpler and easier and brings about the same result.

The Devas do not stand alone. The Asuras are always there, somewhere beyond the corner. The stories of the fights between Devas and Asuras are carried on in the Puranas with a wealth of detail of which only a faint hint can be seen in Vedic literature. And there are other stories also. Some of these are quite clearly descriptions of psychic phenomena in the language of story. Take the story of the fight between Mahishasura and Devi. The Devas and Asuras are, it must be remembered, step-brothers, being the sons of Kashyapa from his two wives, Adit and Diti. The Asuras are as powerful as the Devas but they employ their energies to upset the balance of nature and destroy the good work done by the Devas. Mahishasura had grown very powerful through his austerities. The gods, including Vishnu and Shiva, had been defeated by him and he drove the gods out of their heavenly abodes. They dared not show themselves publicly. Then, in their hour of extreme agony, their teja, the power that was in them, came out and coalesced, assuming the form of a woman. She challenges and defeats Mahisha-

sura, their combined power thus accomplishing a task which individually they had failed to perform. They had combined formerly also in their armies but the combination was superficial. Each was conscious of his own separate identity. When pain and humiliation had destroyed their self-consciousness and pride, the union of hearts and powers became real and its strength was irresistible. Equate Devas and Asuras with the ethical and non-ethical urges of the human mind and the whole story becomes crystal clear. After killing them, Devi does not send the Asuras to hell as they deserved to be or utterly destroy them; she has already purified them by killing them with her sword and sends them to the higher regions.

Again, the meaning is obvious. The bad, elemental urges have to be subdued and deprived of the ascendency which they have acquired over the mind, driving out the good thoughts which should be lodged there, but the energy which is locked up in them is not to be allowed to run waste. These urges are sublimated, purified and then sent to the regions of bliss. Then they take godly forms, beneficent to humanity. The history of Art provides ample proof of this.

When we come nearer our own times, the

Kaliyuga, Asuras gradually yield place to Rakshasas, powerful individuals, human or almost human, but for their congenital propensity to viciousness. And, sometimes, they are probably historical figures.

But if gods and demons have gained in stature, man also has grown. As I said in the beginning, the Gupta era was an age of progress, peace and prosperity. Man had risen in stature and was proud of his achievements. There are numerous stories in the Puranas showing man's superiority even to the gods, if he would only use the capacities inherent in him. As an example, I shall briefly relate the story of Chyavana. He was cured of his blindness and rejuvenated by the Asvi twins. From the very important status they occupied in the Vedas, these brothers had been reduced during the Pauranic age to the position of medical attendants of the gods. It also seems that, at some time or other, oblations had ceased to be offered to them. When Chyavana pressed them to accept something from him as their fees, they requested that he might help to restore their former position of equal participation with other gods in Yajnas. Chyavana agreed and soon after, at his suggestion, his father-in-law who was a neighbouring prince, made arrangements for a big Yajna. Chyavana

himself officiated as the chief priest. All the gods were there and the Asvis also hovered in expectation outside the gates. All went well till Chyavana recited a Mantra and invited the Asvis in. Indra objected and, when Chyavana persisted, raised his hand to strike him down with his thunderbolt. Chyavana at once created a powerful demon who proceeded towards Indra who felt completely paralysed. Shiva and Vishnu were also there but they told Indra that they were powerless to help him. He must plead with Chyavana for mercy. Indra did so and was pardoned. The Yajna ended with the former privileges of the Asvis restored to them and the demon destroyed by its author.

Incidentally, this story throws light on a controversy which had apparently broken out at some time about the Asvis. Chyavana seems to have succeeded in having it settled in favour of the status quo ante. But the main thing is that a human being proved more powerful than all the gods, thus justifying the proud boast:

मनुष्यः कुरुते यत्तु न तच्छक्यं सुरासुरैः

"It is not possible for the gods or the Asuras to do what man does".

There are also a number of stories connected

with the Rishi Vishwamitra. His name occurs first in the Rig Veda along with that of Vashishtha. The two found themselves on different sides in a great war. The memory of this fight is preserved in the Puranas where the two are shown to have lived for thousands of years and engaged in a hundred fights against each other. Several times, the gods have to bow before the prowess of Vishwamitra.

What I have called the anthropomorphisation of the gods and the acceptance of the theory of Avataras led to certain very important changes. Perhaps the most noticeable of them was the emphasis on the emotional aspect of human nature and of Religion. The major Avataras had lived for long among men; they had acted as sons, brothers, husbands, lovers, warriors and statesmen. Hundreds of incidents had happened in their lives and a large number of stories had grown up around them. Some of these incidents are replete with unparalleled examples of filial affection, conjugal love, utter self-surrender to God, boundless compassion for man and the lower creatures, selfless altruism and courage of the highest order; they are object-lessons in devotion to duty and self-sacrifice. But there are other incidents whose crudity and the shallowness of character they reveal make one wonder, to say

the least. These heroes are intensely human; they give glimpses of humanity at its highest but they also have a generous share of human weaknesses.

This age gave rise to certain wonderful concepts in the field of religion. They were not new; their origins lie in the Vedas but the personification which the gods underwent allowed free play to the imagination both of the poet and the unlettered man in the street. One such concept is that of Rudra-Shiva. The popular mind puts the Rudra aspect very much in the background. Folk lore and folk songs are full of stories of Shiva roaming about the country-side with his consort Parvati, seeking out people in distress and helping men and women in their domestic troubles. No problem is too big or too petty. Shiva and Parvati will grant wealth and children, restore milk to dry cows, smooth out quarrels between husbands and wives and do everything else that is needed to make people happy. There is very often a fund of humour in many such stories and the literature that has grown around them. In despair at Shiva's uncontrollable habit of granting even heaven to thoroughly disreputable people, the great poet Tulasidas makes Brahma complain in the following humorous words to Parvati:

बावरो रावरो नाह भवानी ।
दानी बड़ो नित देत दिये बिन वेद बड़ाई भानी ।।
जिनके भाल लिखी नहिं मेरी सुख की नेकु निसानी ।
तिन रंकन को नाक सँवारत हौ आयों नकवानी ।।
निज घर की बर बात बिलोकहु हौं तुम परम सयानी ।
यह सम्पदा सौंपिये औरहिं भीख भली मैं जानी ।।

'Bhavani, your husband is mad. He is such a big giver, he gives to people who never give anything, thus destroying the respect due to the Veda which lays down the laws of Karma. I am fed up with arranging residence in heaven for those on whose foreheads I never drew even a line indicating happiness. Yo are wise: see what is going on in you house. Better give this position of Brahma to some one else. I think begging is better.'

This is a reference to the fact that Shiva has the beggar's bowl in his hand and yet upsets all the plans of Brahma.

But, in my opinion, the greatest, the highest of all such concepts is that of Ardha-Narisvara. The Lakshmi-Narayan image is there but it is not so delicate. Lakshmi is represented as sitting near the feet of Vishnu. It is an eternal pair, Narayana and his Shakti, but Shakti is shown as subordinate to her lord. There is a suggestion of dualism, of the two being separate entities with Narayana as the superior member. Philosophically, this representation

can go no higher than the Vishishtadvaita system of thought. Essentially the two may be one, but they are also permanently two.

The Ardha-Narishvara concept is based on Advaita-vada, some form of monism. It starts with the idea that what exists, what is the substratum of the universe, is One. There is no He and no She but rather an It which is both He and She. The whole world is a manifestation of that principle, that substance. It is incomprehensible to the intellect and indescribable. As the Veda says, it is that

यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह ।

'from which words and the intellect return, without having reached it'. But looking at the universe, man must express what he sees and mentally grasps in some form. Thus he sees that principle as a substance which presents itself to us in two aspects, variously called Paramatma and Svadha, Prakasa and Vimarsa, Parameshvara and Parameshvari. These are not separate entities but related to each other somewhat as the obverse and reverse of a coin. Kalidas has described the relationship in the words वागर्थाविव सम्पृक्तौ 'related as a word and its meaning'. The universe can be described as the result of the inter-play of these two aspects of this di-une substance. Ardha-

Narishvara is an attempt, and the best so far made anywhere, to represent this idea. The body of Ardha-Narishvara is half-male and and half-female. The organs of the body, the ornaments and other decorations, the objects held in the hands—all are symmetrically distributed on the two sides of the body. Neither dominates the other; there can be no question of these being two entities; either would only be half and, therefore, incomplete without the other.

If the Vedic age was the main thesis on Hinduism, the Pauranic age was a brillia commentary on it. Principles, imperson powers, invisible beings endowed with extraordinary capacities—all this was an essential element in our universe but the concepts were much higher than the spiritual level of the ordinary man. The Pauranic age brought heaven down to earth, as it were; it cloth what was subtle and incorporeal with flesh &t brought it nearer to man through the emotio which were apparently common to both. message of hope was brought down for the common man but the path was left clear for the highly advanced soul. There was nothing which was unattainable for man: the gods were his friends and guides and also warnings. Their apparent weaknesses gave an indication

of the dangers which have to be encountered on the road to self-realisation.

A word about God and I have done. There are very few direct references to God in the Vedas. The word Ishvara is there but it stands for Rudra. There was really no need to bring in God in the context of Yajna. Not that there are no references. There is the well-known statement about the Sat, which is true but called by many names by the sages. Or take this:

वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तमादित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात्।
तमेव विदित्वाऽतिमृत्युमेति नान्यः पंथा विद्यते ऽ अयनाय।

. know this great Being, bright as the Sun, beyond darkness. (One) goes beyond death, only by knowing Him. There is no other path (for the journey to self-realisation), or

प्रजापतिश्चरति गर्भेऽन्तरजायमानो बहुधा विजायते।
तस्य योनिं परिपश्यन्ति धीरास्तस्मिन् ह तस्थुर्भुवनानि विश्वा॥

ajapati enters the womb. He is really unn and yet is born several times, i.e. appears be born in various bodies. His true form in which all the worlds are established is seen only by the sages'.

In Pauranic times, however, the concept of God had to be clearly emphasised and explained. Buddhism and Jainism both denied the existence of God, hence, as one of the impor-

tant tenets of Vedic religion, it was necessary to draw pointed attention to this idea. Again, there was the danger of the idea of God getting lost or relegated to the back-ground in the multiplicity of powerful personalities like Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti and the Avataras. The old Vedic statement, therefore, एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति was emphasised in a hundred ways in all the Puranas. The fact was not allowed to be lost sight of that Shiva, Vishnu and the other gods were, in essence, various aspects of the same God and that all worship goes to Him. In the words of Pushpadantacharya:

रुचीनां वैचित्र्यादृजुकुटिलनानापथजुषाम्
नृणामेको गम्यास्त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ।

'According to their various temperaments, men follow many paths but ultimately all worship goes to Thee, as the water of all the rivers, after flowing devious paths, reaches the ocean'.

It is a fact, a wonderful fact for which o has to be thankful, that this great lesson st filtered down to the most unlettered of m They may worship a hundred different gods a hundred different ways, but they are aware that essentially there is only one object of worship and the same face is visible in a hundred coloured glasses. This faith is the basis of that toleration which is such an important attribute of Hinduism.

III. MODERN TIMES

'Modern Times' is a very vague expression in the present context. Not being a student of history, I am not particularly distressed by the fact that it is a very unorthodox system of chronology that I am adopting in treating the last one thousand years as included in Modern Times. A more detailed sub-division of time is possible, but not particularly necessary, from my point of view.

The social and political background of this period has to be remembered. Taken as a whole, the Hindu has not been a free man during all these years. There have been Hindu kingdoms but they have either existed as vassal states or been engaged in fighting for their free existence, finally to succumb. Foreign rule is not congenial to development of character. It enervates a people, making them pessimistic and timid and robs them of self-confidence. There was certainly something, a spark of genuine spiritual strength, which enabled the Hindu to survive during all these centuries and carry on an unequal struggle for political freedom, a struggle which often ended in defeat and suppression but was never wholly

given up. But they were bad days, nonetheless.

Political subordination was not the only curse from which the Hindu suffered. All around him were the ruins of broken temples and the practice of his religion was not unoften a humiliating experience. It was not always so, of course, but there was nothing very elevating even in those periods in which he could breathe a little more freely. There has not been any religious persecution during the latter part of this period and there has been time enough to forget much of the degradation of the past but political subjugation was still there to a large extent. Hindus have been paying in full for their folly in allowing their country to break up into a number of small states, incapable of offering any resistance to a foreign invader, torn by a hundred petty jealousies which would not allow them to come to one another's help. Great personalities came on the stage but all suffered from a myopia which would not permit them to see a common danger.

This could hardly be an age of great religious development. Intellectual achievement had also come almost to a stop, scholars generally confining themselves to commentaries on older works. But there were some develop-

ments, nonetheless, some of them of great significance.

I know I am treading on very difficult and contentious ground now and beg to be excused, if I happen, although unintentionally, to hurt anyone's feelings. It was these otherwise dark ages which saw the emergence of the great Bhakti cult. Not that it had no roots in the past. A passage in the Upanishads says:

यस्य देवे परा भक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ।
तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥

'These truths reveal themselves to the Mahatma who has supreme Bhakti for God and similar Bhakti for his Guru'. Patanjali in whose system God has a very secondary place also speaks of Ishvara-Pranidhana.

But the spread and development of the Bhakti doctrine far over-shadowed any such references to it in ancient literature. It was eminently suited to the mentality of a defeated people who had lost all hope and all faith in themselves, who were living images, as it were, of frustration and on the point of losing their national and cultural identity. The doctrine led to a spate of poetry, mostly prayers, which exceeded in volume anything known to past ages. But what a contrast in quality ! In Vedic

times, prayers had been addressed to the gods for prosperity, long life and victory

अस्माकं वीरा उत्तरे भवन्तु

'May our brave men be victorious'

योऽस्मान् द्वेष्टि यं च वयं द्विष्मः

'He who is inimical to us and he to whom we are inimical', both are to be severely punished by the gods. The man of Pauranic times was also a high-souled individual, animated by great ambitions. His request is:

रूपं देहि जयंदेहि, यशो देहि द्विषो जहि

'Give me a handsome body, give me victory, give me fame and defeat my enemies.'

But I have searched in vain for anything similar to this in the whole of Bhakti literature as it exists in Hindi. No Bhakta is interested in anything but the cessation of the cycle of births and deaths and his elevation to Go-loka or wherever else the object of his devotion resides. He does not pray for the end of alien rule, for the re-establishment of Dharma, for the re-building of the temples, razed to the ground, for strength to relieve misery. His prayers are for himself and of a completely escapist nature. He calls upon निर्बल के बल राम and his prayer, I am sure was heard. He got

strength, not to fight evil and conquer it, but to bear his sufferings and humiliations with fortitude. Few, alas too few, were those who had the head and the heart of a Samartha Ram Das.

Gone were the days when men greeted their gods as सखाय: friends, and called themselves अमृतस्य पुत्रा: children of Immortality, of the Immortal. Now everyone was anxious to add दास to his name. They were पतित fallen, and searched for the पतितपावन. It was in times like these that the atrocious statement, heard on the occasion of many a puja, was first perpetrated!

पापोऽहं, पापकर्माहं, पापात्मा, पापसम्भव: ।

'I am a sinner, a doer of evil, and sinful in essence, born of sin.'

What a great libel and repudiation of the very essence of all that the Vedas stand for, the Vedas which are still supposed to be the scriptures of Hinduism. A man may be an evil-doer but, if the individual is identical in essence with the Paramatma, he cannot be a Papatma. No one whose parents were married according to Vedic rites at which Agni and the other gods act as witnesses can be said to be born of sin. And yet such a sinful sentence passed unchallenged.

Of course, prayers were addressed mostly to the Preserver, Vishnu, and more particularly to one or the other of his two Avatars, Rama and Krishna. It is a sad commentary on the times that one of the names by which Krishna was affectionately known and worshipped was Ranachhor—he who ran away from battle. This refers to the many episodes in which he is said to have avoided taking part in a fight. To me it is unthinkable that people of the Vedic or the Gupta age would have called their God by such a name, even if there were very good reasons why he abandoned the battle-field.

Another commentary, if one were needed, is the high place accorded to Vibhishana in the family of Bhaktas. If Valmiki is to be believed, Vibhishana was a traitor to his country and actuated by the most selfish motives. His very first words when he meets Rama were भवद्गतं हि मे राज्यम् 'my getting a kingdom depends upon you'. A nation of slaves could hardly have any scruples against admitting a traitor to the sacred ranks of the Blessed.

All these changes can hardly be dignified as a development but, to my mind, there is not much else to relate. There was no significant addition to the Pantheon, nothing comparable to Ganesha or Hanuman but the process of accretion did not stop entirely. New aboriginal

tribes were coming into the Hindu fold, not through a process of conversion but through slow and steady assimilation. They took over the prominent Hindu gods and goddesses, Rama, Krishna, Shiva-Parvati, Kali and Ganesha but did not give up their old gods. Some of the latter, specially the goddesses, became easily identified with the new and obviously more respectable gods adopted by the tribe. The rest retained a more or less subordinate status, after undergoing such metamorphosis as was necessary to enable them to feel at home in the new company in which they found themselves. The process is still going on. I remember reading about a god who has newly made his appearance among some tribes in Central India. He is called Saheba. He is a tall person, dressed in European clothes with a hat on his head and accompanied by his spouse, the lady being also dressed in what can pass as European dress. The pair are supposed to have the power to ward off bad epidemics. They have not displaced any of the existing gods of the tribe but are new additions to the family.

Even Islam made its contribution. Except for the patronage extended to the tazias of Hasan and Hussain even by Hindu rulers, presumably for purely political reasons, I do

not think that what might be called the higher sections of Hindu society ever took to worshipping any personality with Muslim associations. But not only the two brothers Hasan and Hussain but some other Muslims also did become objects of partial worship among the people on the fringes of society. Curiously, Mohammad was never worshipped anywhere, to my knowledge.

I shall give you an example of one of these Muslim personalities who not very long ago was worshipped by several lakh Hindus in eastern Uttar Pradesh. His name was Syed Salar Ghazi. He invaded the district of Bahraich some centuries ago. This district, as you might be aware, was one of the most important centres of Surya worship, the god being known as Balarka. The Rajput rajah offered battle and the invaders were badly beaten. Then they thought of a ruse. They moved forward, driving a herd of cows before them. This completely upset the Rajputs. They would not use their arrows, lest the cows might be hit. The Ghazi won an easy victory; the Raja and many of his men were killed, not feeling themselves free to use their arms, while the invader was cruelly subjecting them to a rain of arrows. The temple was broken into and the image of Balarka destroyed. The tomb

of the Ghazi stands today at the site of the temple. But now comes the most curious part of the story. Somehow, in the course of some decades, the facts got completely distorted. It came to be believed that the Syed met his death in defence of cows. Naturally this made him a hero in the eyes of Hindus. He has even become endowed with a part of the name Balarka, coming to be known as Bale Mian. His tomb drew large numbers of pilgrims, mostly Hindus. Thanks to the efforts of the Arya Samaj, this has practically come to an end. The actual history of what had actually happened has also gradually come to light. One wonders what to think of the Raja and his men! It is a number of such suicidal incidents, deluded conceptions of religious duty, which make up the tragic part of India's history.

No mention of the religious life of this period can be complete without a reference to the remarkable change which has taken place in the popular concept of God. In the ancient Vedas, if the word Ishwar is used at all, it stands for Rudra. No oblations are offered, and No prayers are addressed to God as such. But there are many references though not by name, to Paramatma, the 'over-soul' of the universe.

पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यम्

'Purusa is verily all this, (both) what was in the past and what will be in the future.'

अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्

'The Lord of this in the highest heavens'.

It is not necessary for me to enter into a philosophical discussion about the nature of the Paramatma or His relation to the Jivatma. One thing, however, is clear. He could not have had much in common with the God of the Semitic religions. He could not have been the Creator of the Universe or its Destroyer according to his sweet will. Belief in the law of Karma is incompatible with belief in an arbitrary God. If God can create the universe out of nothing, the first creatures to be born would be having happy or unhappy experiences without having done anything to deserve them; if He can destroy the Universe at will, then the creatures living at the time would not have the opportunity to work out the consequences of their actions. God, therefore, can be no more than an Arambhaka, playing a role similar to that of a magnet when brought near iron filings. In its presence, the filings arrange themselves in a north-so[illegible] direction. The property of being able to d[illegible] is already present in them: the magnet simply makes it manifest. The universe is eternal,

beginningless and endless, with phases of evolution and involution. There are times when it, so to say, folds itself up and becomes latent in the Paramatma; at other times, it unfolds itself and blossoms out. In both cases, the Karmas of the Jivas are the deciding factor. The Jiva may be described as the Paramatma enveloped in nescience: the Paramatma is, so to say, the ideal which the Jiva has to strive to reach. Brahma is pure Chit, consciousness; Paramatma is Chetan, conscious. Brahma is It; Paramatma is He or, if you will, She.

This is not the conventional Isvara, God, known to popular Hinduism today. First, there was the impact of Islam. By a natural process, not difficult to understand, the virile God of the Conqueror over-shadowed the impersonal Paramatma and the Isvara that emerged was very much an image of the God of the Hebrews, Christians and Muslims. The Bhakti cult, which grew into a powerful tree in the fertile soil provided by the minds of the decadent and suppressed Hindus of the day added [illegible] to His stature. He could now grant prayers and forgive sins and liberation from rebirth could [illegible] through His grace. He could now be [illegible] correctly described as कर्तुमकर्तुमन्यथा कर्तुं समर्थ potent to act, not to act and to act in the opposite way, viz. contrary to the established rules

governing the normal working of the Universe, the laws of nature and of morality'.

The Law of Karma was not given up. It was too deeply imprinted on the Hindu mind and offered solace when everything else failed. The new God and the old Law could not very well go together but some kind of an uneasy compromise was struck up. This compromise could not stand strict logical analysis but the attempt was simply not made. The great poet Tulasidas says at one place in his epic work, the Ramayana

होइहि सोइ जो राम रचि राखा।
को करि तर्क बढ़ावइ शाखा॥

'That alone will happen which God has foreordained, where is the need to indulge in needless discussions'. In another place in the same book, he writes

कर्म प्रधान विश्व करि राखा।
जो जस कीन्ह सो तस फल चाखा॥

'The universe is governed by the Law of Karma; everyone enjoys the fruits of his actions'.

How the two statements can be reconciled with each other is not wholly clear but apparently those who read the book with devotion—and their number is legion—are not seriously troubled by the discrepancy.

It is this Isvara, more personal, more powerful, than the Isvara known to earlier ages who dominates the religious field of today. Talk to the people, not only the unlettered man in the village, but the educated man, even the Sanskrit scholar, and you will come across this concept. For all intents and purposes, He has become the Creator and prayers and complaints are often addressed to Him as if He is the real author of the ills from which humanity suffers.

A significant change, connected with this shift in the concept of God, has come over the meaning of the word Astika. Formerly, a man who accepted the authority of the Veda was an Astika, everyone else was a Nastika. Belief or disbelief in God did not come into this context. Now Astika has come to denote a Theist, a believer in God and Nastika has become almost a term of abuse. All reference to the Vedas has simply vanished from this context. Religion is the most powerful source of inspiration for individuals and communities but it cannot but be affected by the objective and subjective factors present in the environment. I have confined myself only to one aspect of Hinduism but even a brief study of that aspect amply confirms what I have stated about the influence of the environment.

There has been a revolutionary change in the environment in recent years. The country is now free. India's war of independence was unique, as was the personality of its leader. There was an element of spiritual fervour in the movement. Independence has brought new tasks, calling for endurance, courage, steadfastness of character and faith. But we won our freedom in a world drunk with pride at the achievements of physical science and laughing at what appeared to be the verbal juggleries of religion. Man is conscious of his power and is looking forward to ever-widening new horizons. He dreams of establishing empires in areas light-years away from earth. India naturally shares in this intellectual pride and this ambition.

The educated young Indian is as keen a devotee of physical science as anyone else; he is equally cynical about religion. The welfare State that India has established can only spe in terms of bread and the things for whi bread stands. It is based on secularism whic in practice is often indistinguishable from anti-Religionism, if such a word is permissible.

Along with this universal paean of triu at the achievements of Science, there i equally universal fear that man can easily be tempted to use his power and knowledge to

commit mass suicide. The restraining hand of Religion is not there and any day man may run amuck. The consequences will be terrible. Naturally, India shares these fears also.

Then there are politico-economic theories, based on a purely materialist philosophy. These theories promise relief from want, exploitation and social and political subjugation to all men. They naturally attract attention, specially of the young. The nation must make up its mind about such doctrines.

India is passing through a great period of cultural renaissance. We seem to be on the threshhold of another brilliant age like that of the Guptas. All the treasures and techniques of Western Art are at our disposal, along with the works of great Indian masters of old. The Artist is free in his choice of technique and motif but in Painting and Sculpture there is a definite tendency to seek inspiration from the past. In music, we never gave up our old traditions, although the influence of cheap Western music had made itself felt considerably in the domain of the Cinema. Through the agency of the films, this variety of music has spread far and wide and already begun to debase folk music. But there is a fortunate swing of the pendulum in musical taste. More attention is now being paid to classical music. There is no

reason why music should remain static. It will, let us hope, grow richer and deeper in form and content in response to the changing mood of the people.

A great searching of heart is going on, specially among the younger generation. Much of it is below the conscious level. It is, therefore, if anything, more painful and likely to give rise to more un-controlled actions. Many of the old values seem to have lost all influence; they seem meaningless and indefensible. But new ones have not taken their place. Life itself seems to have no meaning. There is existence from moment to moment but no thread to link the moments together. The responsibility for this must be borne by our leaders. They refuse to speak any language except that of the flesh. In a world in which ideologies are running riot, India is supposed not to need any philosophical support for its life, individual and communal. The result is that the mind of the young—and these are the teachers and administrators of tomorrow—is like a shuttle-cock, thrown about from one doubt to another, subject to all the winds of passion and prejudice that may happen blow across the mental horizon. Such a of affairs cannot last for long. The human mind will not find rest till it devises a new set of

values to suit its new environment and it can be hoped that the new values will be based on, and derive sustenance from, those fundamentals of Indian thought which have helped us to survive the adverse circumstances which have been our lot for centuries.

Much as some of us are in the habit of speaking about secularism, interpreting this word as equivalent to indifference towards Religion, to use a very mild expression, religious movements are also going on. There are bodies like the Arya Samaj, which stand strictly for going back to the Vedas. According to them, the Vedas do not teach the existence of separate gods and goddesses. This naturally makes the whole framework of Hinduism as evolved during the Pauranic period anti-Vedic. There is no doubt that the Samaj has strongly influenced thought even among those who are not organically connected with it. On the other hand, there is the movement associated with the names of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekanand. While its prime objective seems to be to propagate Vedanta, it certainly lends its support to the invocation of gods and goddesses, especially [illegible] Shakti. Nor must one forget to take note of the work done by the Theosophical Society. It certainly did much to popularise the idea of

the existence of a hierarchy of gods and goddesses, superior souls, possessed of mysterious, occult powers and of groups of people whose spiritual development was far beyond that of the ordinary run of human beings. There has also been a revival of interest in the occult, not only through the teachings of bodies like the Theosophical Society but from other influences, that of Sri Aravind Ghosh, for example.

The literature of a country is at once a source of inspiration and an index of the state of public feeling at the time. It is a source of satisfaction that even in those days when religion was mainly concerned with singing the praises of God, subtly combining flattery with petitions for help, there were poets who were inspired by other, more altruistic themes. Bhushana, who had as his patron the great Shivaji himself, is an example that immediately comes to mind in this connection. Such poetry was there because in the face of the most hostile circumstances, one section or another of the Hindu people was always fighting for its lost freedom. The fight was unequal but it ranged over the whole sub-continent, now flaring up in one part, and again, in anot[illegible] Modern literature reflects the popular m[illegible] extraordinarily well. You will excuse me if, due to my lack of knowledge, I can draw only upon

Hindi. I am sure that what is true of Hindi is true of all other Indian languages. Growing awareness of nationalism, irritation at the loss of freedom and the suppression of national culture, frustration, resolve to break through the trammels, pessimism, hope, faith, confidence in the nation's destiny are all there. Tagore's words

> यदि तोर डाक सुने केउ ना आसे
> तबे ऐकला चलो, ऐकला चलो, ऐकला चलो, हे

'If no one responds to your call, move alone, move alone, move alone' finds an echo in every Indian heart. Bankim's composition, the Bande Mataram, stirred all India. One can feel the heart throbbing with exaltation in these words of Jaya Shankar Prasad. Written long ago, it seems particularly apposite for the present day.

> हिमाद्रि तुंग शृंग से प्रबुद्ध शुद्ध भारती।
> स्वयंप्रभा समुज्ज्वला, स्वतंत्रता पुकारती।।
> अमर्त्यवीर पुत्र हो, दृढ़ प्रतिज्ञ सोच लो।
> प्रशस्त पुण्य पंथ है, बढ़े चलो बढ़े चलो।।
> असंख्य कीर्ति रश्मियाँ, विकीर्ण दिव्य दाहसी।
> सपूत मातृभूमि के, रुको न सूर साहसी।।
> अराति सैन्य सिन्ध में, सुवाडवाग्नि से जलो।
> प्रवरी हो जयी बनो, बढ़े चलो बढ़े चलो।।

...n the highest peak of the Himalaya, the awakened goddess of Freedom, the Effulgent, Self-luminous, Pure Bharati calls you. You

are the brave sons of immortality, steadfast of purpose, the road of Dharma is wide, move ever forward. Innumerable rays of fame, spread all around you as Divine light. O, brave soldiers, worthy sons of the motherland, do not stop. Burn as the volcanic fire in the sea of the army of the enemies. You are heroes, win victory, move ever forward.'

One senses the mind lifting itself upto the foot-stools of the Infinite mother in tune with these words of Nirala, which seem to shine with something of the aura of a Vedic Mantra.

वर दे, वीणा वादिनि, वर दे।
प्रिय स्वतंत्र रव, अमृत तेज नव, भारत में भर दे ।।
काट अन्ध उर के बंधन स्तर
वहा जननि ज्योतिर्मय निर्झर
कलुष भेद, तम हर, प्रकाश भर
जगमग जग कर दे, वीणा. . .
नवगति, नव लय, ताल छन्द नव
नवलकंठ, नव जलदमंद्र रव
नव नभके, नव विहगवृन्द को
नव पठ, नव स्वर दे, वीणा. . .

'O, player on the Vina, give us this blessing. Fill Bharata with the dear sound of Freedom, the new Mantras of immortality. Destroy all the dark bonds of the heart. O, Mother, l[illegible] there flow the currents of light. Pierce S[illegible] remove darkness, fill with light. Let there be dazzling brightness. O player on the Vina.

New movement, new laya, new rhythm, new metre, new throats, new sound like that of a new cloud. Give new wings and a new voice to the new birds flying under new skies, O, player on the Vina'.

India is at this moment facing problems which are very exacting indeed. Apart from what is needed to make up for lost time and attain a level of economic strength in consonance with her position in the family of nations, she has been forced into a war for her political independence and the integrity of her territory. The country has never had such an experience at any time in her history. It is likely to be a protracted war, taxing to the utmost all our moral and material resources. But, perhaps, the war, with all the suffering and sacrifice it will entail, may prove, in the end, to be a blessing in disguise. It has already introduced a seriousness in our lives to which we had become almost strangers. It is sure to purge our characters of all flabbiness and to make us more sensitive and responsive to the spiritual element in life. It seems to me that India will re-discover her soul, that element of her culture which has helped her to preserve her identity through a hundred vicissitudes of fortune when so many other contemporary

cultures have disappeared without leaving a trace.

It may be that there will be a new religious movement, a new orientation. An India which will have brought a bitter war to a successful conclusion will be a country of buoyant citizens, full of confidence in themselves and their destiny, brave and generous, truly Aryan. Such a people are bound to have a religious life, deeply spiritual, attuned to that world-spirit, that living Prana which pulsates through us, in us, all around us. Those men will again be able to say:

मनुष्यः कुरुते यत्तु तन्न शक्यं सुरासुरैः।

And it may be that the age of the bright gods of the Vedic age will again dawn upon the earth. The renaissance to which I have drawn attention is a continuous process but it is sure to have a profound effect upon our attitude towards the Devas and the Devatas and our relationship with them. Religious thought is at present stagnant but it cannot remain so for ever. We might recover the key to the mysteries and acquire a better understandi[illegible] of what the Vedas have to say. If this happ[illegible] we shall get a better insight into the na[illegible] of the gods and approach closer to them, not as miserable sinners, abject beggars for mercy,

but as individuals striving sincerely and steadfastly to deserve the epithet अमृतस्य पुत्राः confident of the interest taken in us by the gods and of their help and guidance in walking along the path that leads to the final goal of life, the परम श्रेयस् – and, in the meantime, acting so as to make ourselves worthy partners with the gods in the task of establishing the rule of Dharma in all the worlds.

त्रातारमिन्द्रमवितारमिन्द्रं हवेहवे सुहवं शूरमिन्द्रम् ।
ह्वयामि शक्रं पुरुहूतमिन्द्रं स्वस्ति नो मघवा धात्विन्द्रः ॥